

**STATION TO STATION: CONTEMPORARY BRITISH LITERATURE AND  
URBAN SPACE AFTER THATCHER**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

“Station to Station: Contemporary British Literature and Urban Space After Thatcher,” examines specific literary representations of public and private urban spaces in late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup>-century Great Britain in the context of the shifting tensions that arose from the Thatcherite shift away from state-supported industry toward private ownership, from the welfare state to an American-style free market economy. This project examines literary representations of public and private urban spaces through the following research question: how did the textual mapping of geographical and cultural spaces under Margaret Thatcher uncover the transforming connections of specific British subjects to public/private urban space, national identity, and emergent forms of historical identities and citizenship? And how were the effects of such radical changes represented in post-Thatcher British literary texts that looked back to the British city under Thatcherism?

Through an analysis of Thatcher’s progression towards policies of privatization and social reform, this dissertation addresses the Thatcherite “cityspace” (Soja) and what Stuart Hall calls the “deregulation of the city” (23) as these open my research to issues of spatially affected identities in literary representations of the British city at the turn of the century. My four case studies move from a broad discussion of the effects of the heritage industry on the city and the individual (Iain Sinclair’s *Lights Out for the Territory* [1997]); to the relationship between space, identity, and the rolling back of the welfare state as it plays out in the stigmatization and neglect of council estate housing (Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* [1993]); to representations of race and entrepreneurialism in the Thatcherite city (Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* [2003]); and, finally, to representations of space, gay identities, and class during a period of institutionalized homophobia (Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Line of Beauty* [2004]). The

project takes as its aim the tracing of various tentacles of Thatcherism as they creep across the spaces of the British city in a way that draws attention to how the processes and flows of Thatcherite neoliberal policies circulate across the spaces of the city, forever altering the ways in which individuals move and form identities within those spaces.

## PREFACE

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*For my parents, always*

## INTRODUCTION

### **The Spatial Turn: Dialectics of Space and Identity**

*[T]he social relations of production have a social existence only insofar as they exist spatially; they project themselves into a space, they inscribe themselves into a space while producing it. (Lefebvre, *Production of Space* 152-3)*

*To dissect the urban process in all of its fullness is to lay bare the roots of consciousness formation in the material realities of daily life. It is out of the complexities and perplexities of this experience that we build elementary understandings of the meanings of space and time; of social power and its legitimations; of forms of domination and social interaction; of the relation to nation through production and consumption; and of human nature, civil society, and political life. (Harvey, *The Urban Experience* 230)*

Despite the interdisciplinary focus on what Edward Soja has coined the “spatial turn,” there has not yet been an extended investigation into literary representations of contemporary British urban spaces forever changed by shifts in Margaret Thatcher’s socio-political policies of privatization during the 1980s and beyond.<sup>1</sup> Working through cultural theories set forth by Stuart Hall at the intersection of urban, geographic, and literary studies, the present study builds on Soja’s concept of a “critical spatial perspective” of urban

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<sup>1</sup> While Sebastian Groes has engaged with literary representations of the Thatcherite city, and John Kirk has investigated literary representations of class in 1980s literature, my specific focus is to marry the two positions in a way that allows me to explore how my chosen texts challenge and write the British subject as stuck in space and, as such, defined by the class that is perceived to occupy that space.

spaces, since, as he suggests, the “social is always at the same time...spatial” (8). It is with this “spatial turn” in mind, specifically “the reassertion of a critical spatial perspective in contemporary social theory and analysis” (Soja 1), that I undertake my examination of literary representations of British urban spaces under and after Thatcher. Identifying the crossroads of politics, culture, and shifts in capitalism, I turn to the dialectic linkages between space, identity, and capitalism (Smith, Harvey) in order to discuss textual representations of the struggles of class, race, and identity in Thatcher’s Britain. With the “spatial turn” as my theoretical foundation, my dissertation examines literary representations of the sociocultural and political effects of Thatcherite social programs and policies of privatization as they considerably altered the connection Britons had with urban processes, citizenship, and the spatiality of the city.

I am specifically interested in the ways in which British cultural studies and urban spatial theory can be implemented in understanding the various and divergent identities that co-exist within British urban spaces as they are represented in late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century British literature. In this study, I examine four literary works: Iain Sinclair’s *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997); Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* (1993); Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* (2003); and Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Line of Beauty* (2004). In doing so, I also promote the usefulness of employing urban spatial theory as a way to understand and interpret Thatcher’s epoch as one that deeply affected notions of identity, both at the local and national levels. My intention in this study is to lay bare the dialectic relationship between space and identity in a way that subverts the notion that gentrification, class, and immigration are social phenomena that exist outside of space.

The scope of Thatcher's deregulation of public space is evidenced in a wealth of cultural production during her years in power. In 1980, the same year that council flats became available for sale through the Right to Buy scheme, Linton Kwesi Johnson published *Inglan' is a Bitch*, a collection of dub-poems targeting Thatcherism as responsible for the alienation of colonial identities in London. In 1982, as unemployment passed the three million mark and Thatcher invoked colonial nationalist rhetoric in response to the Falklands War, Alan Bleasdale's mini-series *Boys from the Blackstuff*, a bleak look into the effects of Thatcherism on working-class families, aired on BBC2. Other works such as Stephen Frears' *My Beautiful Launderette* (1985), The Smiths' *Meat is Murder* (1985), Alan Cox's *Sid and Nancy* (1986), The Communards *Don't Leave Me this Way* (1986), Mike Leigh's *High Hopes* (1988), Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988), Martin Amis' *London Fields* (1989), Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989), and Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), while no means comprising an exhaustive list, nevertheless provide evidence of a significant cultural and artistic response to the kinds of sociopolitical upheavals that became the hallmark of Thatcherism in the 1980s. Issues such as diasporic British identities (Frears, Rushdie, Kureishi), abject drug abuse (Cox), AIDs, gay rights, and working-class identities (Amis, Leigh, Communards, The Smiths), and the fears surrounding the perceived dilution of English identity (Ishiguro) permeated the politically charged cultural production of the decade. As David Harvey suggests, urban space is "somewhere where fact and imagination simply have to fuse"; and nowhere is this more dynamic and striking than in the narratives of this time (*The Urban Experience* 5).

For the present study, I have chosen to focus on literary representations rather than other cultural productions (i.e. film, art, music, etc) because of the way that literary texts

draw attention to the process of writing and inscription as a way of knowing - a process that de Certeau might call the “pedestrian narrative” or that Sinclair might refer to as a “script” deeply tied to the sediment of local history. Such an examination offers a rich and diverse way of uncovering how individual identity is affectively engaged with notions of space and place, and thus also offers us a different way of knowing the city. In laying bare the sociospatial dialectic as it is reflected and engaged in my chosen texts, my aim is to distill through these case studies the possibilities for a new way of thinking about space and identity that challenges the seemingly innocuous methods of spatial acquisition and ownership that are inherently tied to Thatcherite notions of privatization. I examine how Sinclair, Welsh, Ali, and Hollinghurst’s texts write, and rewrite, the city as they capture, subvert, and uncover the tensions inherent in the transformation of British urban space by proposing an understanding of alternative spaces (including the new spatial possibilities of television and communications technology) and emergent citizens, identities, and communities that occurred, and continue to occur, as a result of Thatcherism. All of my chosen texts were written after 1990, the year that Thatcher left office. As a result, these texts also provide insight into the post-Thatcherite city where the revenance of Thatcherite policies of privatization and deregulation continues to haunt British urban spaces. Through the luxury of temporal distance, these texts offer a considered critical approach that rewrites Thatcherism as deeply concomitant with neoliberalism and uneven development as related to urban space and the formation of individual identity.

Indeed, these texts reinvent previous historical narratives in a similar fashion to, and as an antidote against, Thatcher’s nostalgic invocations of Victorian national identity during the Falklands war and throughout her years in power more generally. Certainly, Sinclair’s

excavations, Welsh's resentment of colonization, and Hollinghurst's attention to a Jamesian urban aesthetic all gesture toward such a looking back. Ali's text, however, stands out as a challenge to what might be perceived as Thatcherite nostalgia, since the portrayal of the novel's protagonist, Nazneen, arguably rests on a need to look to a future of economic independence largely framed by Thatcherite practices. My aim, in choosing texts that were written after Thatcher left office in 1990, is to uncover the legacy of such tensions and transformations as they are remembered and refigured partly through the lens of Tony Blair's New Labour government, which in its continuation of Tory policies of deregulation, privatization, and the promotion of the middle class, brought the left closer to the centre than ever before. In choosing texts that look back to the 1980s, I emphasize that though the Thatcher period certainly constituted a discrete epoch, the events and sociopolitical protocols that the period set in motion continue to be deeply engrained in the fabric of British society. With this in mind, each of the chapters in this study begins with an examination of various sociopolitical and cultural contexts for my readings of the literary texts: the heritage industry (Sinclair); the decline of council estates (Welsh); immigrant identities and entrepreneurialism (Ali); and the relationship between citizenship and gay identities (Hollinghurst).

### **Thatcher in Space**

Margaret Thatcher's Conservative political policies during the mid-1980s radically altered the *use* of city spaces in Great Britain, and in doing so rewrote the British city for the postmodern era. Throughout the 1980s, Thatcher's Conservative government set into motion various legislative acts that distanced British identity away from a society based on a politics of consensus and the welfare state towards one structured around what

Thatcherism conceived as Victorian values. Such legislative acts included the Right-to-Buy scheme arising out of the Housing Act in 1980,<sup>2</sup> the Falklands war in 1982, the privatization of British Telecom in 1984 (the first of many publicly owned services to eventually become privatized), and the intense deregulation of market trading through the “big bang” in 1986.<sup>3</sup>

Community and collective ownership of housing and industry such as British Telecom, and the participation in a war with a seeming focus on nostalgic gestures towards Victorian colonial nationalism, encouraged the kind of free-market capitalism that marked individualism and private ownership as key pieces of good citizenship. By privatizing previously state-run programs and industries, Thatcher’s government essentially rewrote the ways in which individual Britons understood themselves as part of, and directly contributing to, the national fabric. As Aaron Kelly argues,

the Thatcher government privileged individualism, the market, and the making of profit above all else and afforded the advantages of its social Darwinism to a limited few at the cost of dismantling the Welfare State and its macro-economic management of nationalized and state-owned industry, the National Health Service, free education and welfare provision for all. (7)

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<sup>2</sup> The Right to Buy scheme meant that private ownership of previous council flats eventually overtook council tenant occupation. While many suggest that the shift from council supported flats to private ownership provided relief for government coffers, critics of the scheme argue that the selling off of the flats reduced housing for those in need to such a degree that there was a marked increase in homelessness. The selling off of council flats became one of many spatial representations of Thatcher’s belief that active citizenship and patriotism was only possible through private ownership. Such spatialization of national identity, set into motion, as David Harvey argues, through Thatcher’s “privatization of social housing in central London,” made it impossible for not only working-class but also middle-class individuals and families to live anywhere near the centre of the city (*Social Justice* 328). In this way, Thatcher’s push to reassign sociopolitical meaning and value to the spaces of the city forced a sea-change in the ways that people negotiated those spaces and, in turn, identified themselves in and through such spaces. For more, see Wright, Hanley.

<sup>3</sup> The “big bang” refers to the sudden deregulation of the financial markets that computerized trading and essentially globalized the marketplace, forever changing the way shares were traded.

Thatcher's Department of Heritage, especially, understood the role that the fusing of imagination and architecture played in shaping national identity. The result was a highly politicized spatialization of national identity, as various buildings and locations were listed as historically significant and thus pivotal to rewriting Britain and the British.

Such appropriation of historically significant space by the Department of Heritage was an attempt to preserve a historical English identity that included the Victorian values of decreased state intervention that Thatcher espoused. For critics such as Patrick Wright, the heritage intervention was a practice in "theme-parking that has turned genuinely historical streets in ... prosperous parts of the country into simulacra, gutting them in the name of taste" (*On Living in an Old Country* 12). Such "taste," as Wright and others such as Hewison declare, created a fiction, a "simulacra," that blurred the boundaries between the real and the imaginary in a way that disguised the neoliberal forces of gentrification. Further, such fiction was concomitant with a rewriting of national identity that paved the way for a constructed nostalgia to replace other versions of historical reality, as less marketable moments of English history were substituted with something much more palatable for tourist dollars.<sup>4</sup> The resulting "theme-parking" of British cultural space worked to preserve a historic national identity in an era of intense globalization: this reactive hardening of a national identity was compellingly tempting as well as divisive and exclusionary, complicating the relationship between national identity and certain demographic groups, such as the unemployed working classes or the postcolonial diasporic

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<sup>4</sup> Julian Barnes's *England England* explores this kind of theme-parking in a way that queries the emptying out and marketing of Englishness to tourist audiences. Through the desire for economic gain, the essence of "Englishness" is lost to pander to tourist attention and, as a side effect, actual Britons are replaced by actors.

populations, which it both courted and excluded. One consequence of such nostalgic projects, placed alongside Thatcher's deregulation of national industry and publicly funded social programs and housing, was that it created the atmosphere for British city streets to become fervent landscapes for resistance, sites, as Stuart Hall suggests, for "the emergence of new subjects, new genders, new ethnicities, new regions, [and] new communities" ("Old and New Identities" 34).

In addition to the far-reaching effects that National Heritage and the Right-to-Buy scheme had on notions of national and local identities, the Thatcherite ideology of privatization metaphorically embraced the streets through the 1986 breaking up of the Greater London Council (GLC).<sup>5</sup> Coupled with the selling off of council houses, the devolution of the Greater London Council involved the disbanding of the government organization that had, since the mid 1960s, controlled and administered the regulation and maintenance of the very streets and transit ways that the likes of Iain Sinclair, Will Self, and Peter Ackroyd, among others, would document as the spaces where British and English identities could be located and excavated.<sup>6</sup> Through the devolution of the GLC, the selling off of council flats, and the encouragement of private investment in traditionally working-class spaces such as the Docklands, Thatcher's politics of fragmentation and privatization were built into the city in ways that altered the manner in which people lived (Right-to-Buy scheme), worked (major investments in the Docklands, the "big bang" and the breaking of

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<sup>5</sup> The GLC was broken up through Local Government Act of 1985.

<sup>6</sup> The GLC had jurisdiction over 32 boroughs in London, including Greater London, most of Middlesex, Kent, Surrey, parts of Essex, Croydon, East Ham, and West Ham. It was responsible for fire services, waste management, and emergency planning, including flood prevention. The GLC also shared responsibility with the London boroughs for road, city, and housing planning as well as leisure services. In 1970 the GLC also became responsible for the public transport. Once the GLC was dissolved, each individual borough was given unitary authority.

the unions), and moved (the devolution of the GLC and eventual privatization of London Transport).

Urban transformation, of course, has been a global phenomenon, and there has been an abundance of contemporary research on representations of individual identity and urban space (Virilio, Massey, De Certeau, Soja). This dynamic research addresses both individual and collective affective responses to, and movements through, the landscape of the city and considers the connections between larger identity construction and individual access to urban spaces and processes. Building on this foundation, the present study focuses on the city, sharing with David Harvey the assumption that

the city is the high point of human achievement, objectifying the most sophisticated knowledge in a physical landscape of extraordinary complexity and splendor at the same time as it brings together social forces capable of the most amazing sociotechnical and political innovation. But it is also the site of squalid human failure, the lightning rod of the conflict. It is a place of mystery, the site of the unexpected, full of agitations and ferments, of multiple liberties, opportunities, and alienations; of passions and repressions; of cosmopolitanism and extreme parochialisms; of violence, innovation, and reaction. The capitalist city is the arena of the most intense social and political confusions at the same time as it is a monumental testimony to and a moving force within the dialectics of capitalism's uneven development. (*Urban* 229)

The scope of social changes instigated by the Thatcher government, specifically deep cuts and reductions to social programs and housing, meet at the crossroads of spatialized identities in a way that demonstrates the kinds of "socially-produced space" Soja theorizes.

As such, we cannot imagine the Thatcherite sociopolitical ripple outside of a particular understanding of space that is deeply connected to individual identities caught and affected by such ripples.

### **The “Spatial Turn”**

Keeping in mind Edward Soja’s “spatial turn,” and through an analysis of Thatcher’s progression towards policies of privatization and social reform, my dissertation establishes the Thatcherite “cityspace” (Soja) and what Hall calls the “deregulation of the city” (23) as these open my examination to issues of spatially affected identities in literary representations of the British city space. Erik Swyngedouw interprets Soja’s “spatial turn” through a theory of spatial scales that “emerges out of the sociospatial character of the perpetual transformation of space” (144). Traditional Marxist critique has focused largely on the significance of time, and imagined space as materially static or geographically fixed. Such a rigid framework, however, fails to take into consideration the ideological, sociocultural, and economic struggles, and thus the *scales*, of urban space. While space and place may not move in a physical sense, the “transformation of space” is directly allied with the surge of social, political, and economic struggles that occur in and through space. While some social theorists suggest that “it is not spaces that ground identifications, but places” (Carter, Donald, & Squires xii), Soja extrapolates that “socially-produced space [is] a created structure comparable to other social constructions ... much in the same way that human history represents a social transformation of time” (80). So while a “place” can be a library, an airport, a building in the city, or any other location that is materially measurable and locatable, space is the thing that produces identity. For many, the notion of space had become synonymous with “rigidity, immobility, stasis; space itself had become a blind

field” (Smith *Urban Revolution* xiii). As Soja argues, “today, however, it may be space more than time that hides consequences from us, the ‘making of geography’ more than the ‘making of history’ that provides the most revealing tactical and theoretical world” (1).

Soja ties the significance of spatial theory specifically to Thatcherism (and its American counterpart, Reaganism):

the reactionary postmodern politics of Reaganism and Thatcherism, for example, must be directly confronted with an informed postmodern politics of resistance and demystification, one that can pull away the deceptive ideological veils that are today reifying and obscuring, in new and different ways, the restructured instrumentalities of class exploitation, gender and racial domination, cultural and personal disempowerment, and environmental degradation. (5)

For Soja, the “spatial turn” involves “an ontological struggle to restore the meaningful existential spatiality of being and human consciousness, to compose a social ontology in which space matters from the very beginning” (7). Without such a theoretical approach, the “deceptive ideological veils” of class warfare are left abstract and vaguely indefinable. It is thus impossible to imagine the varied individual identities effected by urban struggle without having an understanding that “social being [needs to be] actively emplaced in space *and* time in an explicitly historical *and* geographical contextualization” (11). A theoretical analysis of the intense uneven development born of neoliberal Tory policies in 1980s Britain is, in this sense, deeply reliant on an application of urban spatial theory in order to uncover the ways that identity and the “instrumentalities of ... exploitation” were, and are, played out in and through the privatization of space.

Since the tenets of late capitalism are reified through uneven development, specifically as it relates to property ownership, it may be useful to approach a study of the effects of Thatcherism on individual identity formation by examining the “affective geographies” (Soja 1), and what Massey calls “spatial identities” that are produced as a result of neoliberal policies of flexible accumulation and production (Massey 5).<sup>7</sup> As Smith suggests, work such as Henri Lefebvre’s *The Urban Revolution* “stands as a thoroughly contemporary anti-dote to the sense that ‘there is no alternative’ to capitalism, a notion popularized in the grim 1980s by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher” (Smith, *Urban* xviii). Much in the way that Peter Ackroyd imagines the sociocultural significance of the Thames as laying bare the class struggles of the city of London, Lefebvre’s urban spatial theory proposes that “urban phenomenon and urban space are not only a projection of social relationships but also a terrain on which various strategies clash” (*Urban Revolution* 87). Lefebvre declares that “urban space *is* concrete contradiction” (39) and further defines urban space as

the place where people walk around, find themselves standing before and inside piles of objects, experience the intertwining threads of their activities until they become unrecognizable, entangle situations in such a way that they engender

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note here that while my work focuses on the possibilities for a dialectics of space and identity after Lefebvre and Soja, I am not working towards uncovering an ontology of Marxist urban spatial theory. Castells, Harvey and others have taken issue with Lefebvre’s notion that there exists a dialectics of space and identity, while Harvey asserts that “industrial capitalism ... is creating space ... - hence the frequently expressed sense of alienation with respect to created space” (*Social Justice* 311). My work does not dispute Harvey’s assertion, and in fact assumes that created space is derived from capitalist production. However, I would suggest that the social conditions surrounding capitalist production, specifically the ideological function of property ownership and the struggle between the public and the private, drive the creation of space, which, in turn, creates the landscape for what Soja calls “affective geographies.” The discussion that follows turns to the ways in which space and identity are dialectically engaged during the Thatcher period, what I see as an epoch of spatial tumult.

unexpected situations. The definition of this space contains a null vector (virtually); the cancellation of distance haunts the occupants of urban space. (39)

Lefebvre's attention to the lack of "distance" in space is inherent to its definition. Arguably, the "haunt[ing]" gestures to the dialectic relationship between identity and space as the shifting specter of social struggle becomes difficult to pin down and, as a result, difficult to define. It is, as Lefebvre would agree, the shifting "haunt[ing]" that is so influential in the social production of space. For Lefebvre, the notion of "distance" is taken up with the tension between people and things. It is that tension (what I would refer to as the relationship and juxtaposition between images in, for example, modern and postmodern poetry) that is the ideological function. As Lefebvre insists, his use of the terms "urban" and "urbanization" stretch well beyond the immediate confines of cities. Urbanization here is a summative metaphor for the *spatialization* of modernity and the strategic "planning" of everyday life that has allowed capitalism to survive, to reproduce successfully its essential relations of production (*Urban* 50).

In this sense, and in order to understand the *affect* of the urban, what Soja calls "affective geographies," we must turn our attention to the ways in which the urban is spatialized and how, in turn, the spaces of the urban contribute to notions of identity formation. While we often think of the city as somehow coincidental with the urban, it is important to distinguish that while the city can exist as a container for the urban, it does not exist without the urban unless it is uninhabited:

Virtually anything can happen anywhere. A crowd can gather, objects can pile up, a festival unfold, an event – terrifying or pleasant – can occur. This is why urban space is so fascinating: centrality is always possible. At the same time, space can

empty itself, expel its content, become a place of pure scarcity and power.

(Lefebvre, *Urban* 130)

Lefebvre's argument is that the urban is always taking place, in space, yet that space does not necessarily always have to be a space within the city. The urban is a process, and a flashpoint, where social interaction and activity occur and where "centrality is always possible." The urban, or urbanization, can thus be understood as always happening in the inhabited city centre, as it is also always happening in the suburbs and other populated areas. The commodification of space in the "large city," Lefebvre argues, sets the groundwork for such negative urban phenomena as isolation, crime, and violence that occur on the various levels of "mental, moral, [and] social" phenomena and that became more acute throughout Thatcher's years in power.

Of course, the kind of urban commodification and alienation addressed by Lefebvre was in significant ways already present within British cities prior to Thatcherism. In his 1975 novel *High Rise*, JG Ballard's exploration of private property, communal space, and urbanization, the inhabitants of a privately owned high rise tower block become increasingly isolated and violent as they attempt to protect their own flats while, at the same time, take over ownership of their neighbours' flats. Applying urban spatial theory to Ballard's novel makes it possible to read the text as a critique aimed at the mass urban housing constructed out of prefabricated concrete blocks and slabs in Britain during the 1960s, an intended utopia that soon turned dystopic as the failure of non-violent community-building inside the estates led to crime, violence, and dereliction. Such an intended utopia, as Patrick Wright argues in *A Journey Through the Ruins*, proved a desperate failure for countless individuals. As such, "council housing [became] the perfect

symbol for the failings of the public sector: unpopular, socially stigmatizing, incompetently managed and oblivious to consumer preferences” (Cole & Furbey 188). In many respects, the high rise concentrated the social discontent of the city into the smaller container of the tower block. As Lefebvre notes:

Urban alienation contains and perpetuates all other forms of alienation. In it, through it, segregation becomes commonplace: by class, by neighborhood, by profession, by age, by ethnicity, by sex. Crowds and loneliness. Space becomes increasingly rare – it is expensive, a luxury and privilege maintained and kept up through practice (the ‘centre’) and various strategies. (*Urban* 92)

Lefebvre thus sets up a dialectic relationship between the spaces of the city, the urban, and the individual where the forces of market value, moral vice, and community struggle for dominance always at the expense of the “other.” Space, for Lefebvre, becomes deeply enmeshed in the neoliberalizing forces of free-market capitalism (in the form of property ownership and privatization) and, as space becomes more valuable, it also becomes the dividing factor between not only the disparate identities of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, but also the middle and upper classes, as well as the working and middle classes. Space, and individual access to it, thus becomes a way by which the processes of identity are engaged. Along this line of reasoning, we can also expand our definition of what the urban is to include, as Lefebvre does when he refers to the “virtual” concept of the urban where

rather than being an object that can be examined through contemplation, the reality of the urban phenomenon would be a virtual object. If there is a sociological

concept, it is that of ‘urban society’. [...] Urban society, with its own specific order and disorder, is in the process of formation. (*Urban* 58)

It is at this intersection where Lefebvre’s notion of urban space as a process crosses with Stuart Hall’s concept of identity as a process. While for Hall identity is always a process, for Lefebvre that process cannot happen outside of space – it is always spatially rooted, even if that space is not always urban.<sup>8</sup>

However, while detaching the urban from the city may be useful as a foundation for discussing the sociospatialization of identity formation, further analysis is required into just what constitutes “space.” As Smith suggests, “the concept of space tends to be taken for granted, its meaning unproblematic, while in fact it is a vague concept with a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory meanings” (*Uneven Development* 92). He goes on to explain that

the complete abstraction of physical space from matter provoked the possibility of defining other kinds of space in distinction to physical space; when physical space became absolute, it left behind conceptual ‘space’ that would eventually be filled by such concepts as ‘social space.’(98)

The Right to Buy scheme, for example, provided an economic opportunity to those straddling the line between the working and middle classes while at the same time further defining and refining class difference in what had been intended as a class-homogeneous population within council estates. Those who bought their flats through the Right to Buy scheme were free to install new windows, paint their front doors, and renovate at a whim,

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted here that Lefebvre’s notion of the urban is quite different from Kevin Robbins’ articulation of “urbanity”: “universalism and uniformity are associated with a crisis of urbanity. The postmodern city is then about an attempt to re-imagine urbanity: about recovering a lost sense of territorial identity, urban community and public space” (Robbins 304).

thus making clearly apparent the difference between those who owned and those who did not. As such, Lefebvre's "production of space" is deeply reliant on literary and creative re-imaginings, or "organization," of spatial "translation[s], transformation[s], and experience[s]" in order to interpret and flesh out the ways in which space contributes to broader ideas of sociopolitical and historical identity formation.

Chapter 1 of this study turns to Iain Sinclair's compellingly uncategorizable text, *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997), as it meditates on the ways in which we write ourselves, and in turn are written, upon the urban spaces of London. While Sinclair confronts Thatcherite nostalgia through his marked reviling of 1980s gentrification and development, he also specifically explores, complicates, and convolutes England's National Heritage-manufactured "authentic" and privatized English identity. Sinclair thus draws attention to the idea of history as a representation based on specific interests and motives, in this way deeply troubling such claims to authenticity as those made by Thatcher's heritage project in the 1980s. Sinclair's investigation of British urban spaces (in his case, embodied most often by Hackney, in the East End of London) relies on the tension of the imagination, the boundaries between actual historical accounts, and Sinclair's own impressions.

My first chapter, then, uncovers the ways in which the individual British citizen forms identity through the ideological pressures and histories already existing within the urban fabric of the city. The kinds of spaces Sinclair aligns, or puts "beside" as Eve Sedgwick would suggest, create a localized nostalgia deeply reliant on space and juxtaposition. It is in this way, also, that Sinclair approaches the mapping of the city through ideologically driven projects such as National Heritage and video surveillance. I argue that Sinclair's work offers a different way of knowing the city, and functions as a

counterpoise to National Heritage as it documents the intense local minutiae of everyday life experienced through a sense of local history and identity. As Patrick Wright declares, “[t]he whole borough of Hackney is ... a bizarre confusion of fact and fiction, a place where one person’s grim reality serves as everybody else’s exotic film set” (*Journey* 19). Such a “confusion of fact and fiction” was also keenly felt with respect to council housing estates and tower blocks in the East End of London as well as throughout the rest of Britain.

In Chapter 2, I build on the themes laid out in the previous chapter by focusing on Irvine Welsh’s novel *Trainspotting* (1993) as a representation of the nexus of space, identity, and class in the fractured identities of working-class individuals during the Thatcher period as they struggled with significant shifts in their sociopolitical subjectivity that left them floundering to find new ways to form identity and community. I argue that the kinds of ruptures and fractures that the Tory-described “new under class” experienced during the Thatcher years, and beyond, are deeply connected to the spaces in which they lived and the ways in which those spaces were framed sociopolitically. I am specifically interested in the way that Welsh’s text disrupts essentializing notions of identity categories such as class through a temporally disjointed narrative structure, as well as through representations of different identities that all share similar living conditions yet experience them in significantly diverse ways. Thus, the seemingly homogenous category of “under class” is troubled in Welsh’s text as he explores variant identities formed in and through the spaces of council estates that in turn echo the fractured nature of the abject subject (Lee).

In this chapter, I pursue the following line of inquiry: How does Welsh represent the nexus of council housing, community, and drug abuse as deeply connected to issues of class and identity? Further, how does Welsh imagine these kinds of inequalities as reified

through the spatial evidence of the dismantling of the welfare state in a way that further entrenches the growing disenfranchisement of unemployed working-class identities living on council estates? As Aaron Kelly asserts:

In understanding the politics of Welsh's work ... it is vital not to confine our definition to the political in terms of the major parties and the parliamentary system and to instead enlarge its scope into the realm of ordinary people's lives and activities that have become increasingly disaffected from the major institutions of state and society. (8)

It is with this in mind that I investigate the spaces allocated for the proletariat in Britain during the post-war period as they soon became more valuable as other spaces were privatized and individually owned. Thus, the example of council housing becomes significant in looking at the ways that privatization and individual ownership intensified the kinds of social ills of violence, crime, and isolation so prevalent in the city.

In my third chapter, I turn to Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) as I continue to investigate the ways in which marginalized identities negotiate British social spaces in a way that contributes to their processes of identity formation. Ali's novel proposes a problematic kind of multicultural Britishness that rejects the nostalgic working-class Englishness that Enoch Powell declared was at risk during his "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968. *Brick Lane* proposes a hybrid Britishness based on Thatcherite notions of entrepreneurialism and financial individualism that rejects not only Powellite notions of Englishness, but also local Bengali ideas of tradition, culture, and the role of women in the Bengali community. While Ali does not specifically refer to the Race Relations Acts of the 1980s, or the notion of Anderson's "imagined community," I argue that her representations

of race, space, and individualism, deeply nestled amidst the political climate of the early-to-mid 1980s, provide a view of the ways that immigrant identities moved within the neoliberal spaces of the Thatcherite city, and how broad notions of assimilation and hybridity were in many ways subverted, over the course of the 1980s, by notions of entrepreneurialism and individual struggle. However, I further suggest that Ali's novel gestures towards the loss inherent in the shift toward Thatcherite notions of British identity at the expense of cultural and social ethnic communities.

In Chapter 4 I examine Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2004) as it confronts Thatcherite policies of deregulation and postmodern free market economics in a way that draws attention to the kinds of access individuals had to increasingly privatized spaces. Arguably, Hollinghurst spatializes popularly consumed images of Thatcher as *deregulated* and divided (her hair, her handbag, her clothing, etc.) in a way that takes into account Nunn's argument of the fragmented Thatcherite body. Thus, I am interested in the way that Hollinghurst troubles the figure of Thatcher by moving beyond a merely *straight* interpretation of Thatcher's symbolic identity as fragmented towards a representation of Thatcher as freely moving between gendered identities, a representation that creates an opportunity for Nick to access her in a way that the other, straight, men cannot. Hollinghurst's novel, then, is a case study of accessibility and exclusion in terms both of proximity to the figure of Thatcher and to the places that symbolically represent Thatcherite Conservative policies of privatization.

In addition to focusing on the domestic space of the Feddens' party, Hollinghurst also turns to the interior spaces of the Lloyd's building as he investigates the ways in which the figure of Nick Guest negotiates the spaces of capital. Arguably, the Lloyd's building,

completed in 1986 (the same year as the “big bang”), is spatially symbolic of the ideological impact that Thatcherite policies of deregulation had on the spaces of the city. In addition to providing the space for Thatcher’s deregulated market to trade, the architecture of the building (listed in 2011 as architecturally significant by National Heritage) with its exposed elevators and interior shopping-mall-like atrium, was the most notable postmodern structure in the city in the 1980s. Nick’s attempts to imagine the existence of a Jamesian aesthetic somewhere in the hidden offices of the building, perhaps gesturing toward the Victorian dining room made of all the original parts from the old Lloyd’s building, reflects his desire to find a Victorian sense of English identity outside of the spaces of Thatcherite postmodern capitalism. In this sense, Hollinghurst’s text provides an illuminating context to notions of nostalgia, access to space, and intensities of social class that are deeply spatially engaged.

Each of the above outlined chapters functions as a case study of a different aspect of the space-identity dialectic in the British city in ways that uncover the spatialization of identity and the effects that Thatcherite policies of privatization and deregulation had on the processes of identity formation. Iain Sinclair’s *Lights Out for the Territory* provides a broad look at the ways in which historical definitions of space contribute to notions of local and national identity formation, and how uneven development and gentrification in many ways work to erase the evidence of such historical identities. Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting* functions as a case study of the dialectic relationship between identity and space in council estates, and of the social stigmatization that contributes to such identity formation. Monica Ali’s *Brick Lane* offers a representation of female immigrant identity that eventually relies on the spaces of the council flat and the urban spaces around the estate to continue the

process of identity formation, specifically focusing on the way that such identity formation relies on participation in capitalist production as a way to understand the role of the immigrant in the British capitalist system. Lastly, Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* explores the manner in which domestic space, the sexualization of the figure of Thatcher, and representations of the Lloyd's building provide insight into the ways that gay identities, AIDS, and drug abuse were deeply elided with Thatcherite ideals of consumption and wealth accumulation. Read alongside each other, my chosen texts offer a potent investigation and criticism of the effect of Thatcherite policies of privatization that were crystallized in the city, and beyond. Not only do these works provide a record of the sociocultural impacts of the Thatcherite epoch, but they also help to shape the meaning of Thatcher's political upheaval in the British city. It is through such texts that we come to understand and know the British city under Thatcher and after.

## CHAPTER ONE

### “The Script That Has Been Eradicated from the Street”: Iain Sinclair’s *Lights Out for the Territory* and the Mapping of Urban Heritage

*We are the fiction of vanished lives and buildings. They have nothing but our lies to sustain them. (Sinclair, Lights Out for the Territory 237)*

*[T]he mortician, map open across his lap, had gone gloatingly over every inch of his journey. (Sinclair, Lights Out for the Territory 81)*

*We must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology. (Soja 6)*

Iain Sinclair’s *Lights Out for the Territory* represents the urban spaces of London through a fictionalized account of local historical spaces and identities in a way that disrupts and troubles the idea of a locatable, mappable, official history of London. Sinclair’s writing, what we might call a process of becoming within the urban, seeks to uncover the fictions, what he calls “our lies,” planted amidst other deposits and “lies” within the urban spaces of London (*Lights Out* 237). Sinclair refers to his own work as a “mythology” that blends together, for example, various historical accounts with creative illustrations and characters. As Sinclair suggests, “some characters are fictional with true

stories” (Sinclair “Personal Interview”). Sinclair’s approach draws attention to the ways in which we write ourselves, and in turn are written, upon the city through representation rather than fact. In Sinclair’s writing, where the boundaries between actual historical accounts and the author’s own impressions are often difficult to discern, London is a palimpsest that oscillates between historicity and imagination.

*Lights Out for the Territory* meditates on the dialectic relationship between local sociocultural histories revenant in urban space and the identities that live, and have lived, within them. While Sinclair confronts Thatcherite nostalgia through his marked distaste for 1980s gentrification and development, he also specifically explores, complicates, and convolutes England’s National Heritage-manufactured “authentic” and privatized English identity. He draws attention to the idea of history as a representation based on specific interests and motives, and, in so doing, troubles any claims to authenticity such as those made by Margaret Thatcher’s heritage project in the 1980s. With this in mind, I examine *Lights Out for the Territory* as a sociohistorical fiction of the often-fragmented histories and identities rooted in and through British urban space. Sinclair’s text focuses on the street, the architecture, and the local (often subversive and/or forgotten) histories and identities, what he calls a “patina of obscurity,” through “an accumulation of details, fragments, scraps of urban landscape and history,” as he attempts a DIY heritage project that disrupts the possibility of imagining the city as cohesive, mappable, and ultimately marketable (*Lights Out* 33).

For Sinclair, the struggle between local, often working-class, historical urban identities and Margaret Thatcher’s version of English national identity is most evident in the East End of London. With its varied and often stigmatized past, the East End was easily

incorporated into Tory attempts to sanitize and make marketable a resurrected nostalgic colonial-Victorian English national identity through, for example, the preservation of cottage houses or the rhetoric surrounding the Falklands War.<sup>9</sup> Such Tory efforts percolate Sinclair's desire to move through "the real city" as he documents the dialectic minutiae of history, space, and the individual that he encounters, purposefully or accidentally, during his urban *derivé*. It is specifically such uncovering of historical spatiotemporal detail, what Paul Newland calls "territorial excavations," that provides the richest sediment in Sinclair's work (1).

In order to lay the foundations for my discussion of Sinclair's urban excavation, I begin this chapter with the debate around heritage taken up by Stuart Hall, Raphael Samuel, Robert Hewison, and Patrick Wright as it relates to ideas of local and national identity, as well as ideas of inclusivity and exclusivity. Specifically, I focus on urban working-class neighborhoods, such as the Docklands in the East End of London, as they have been uprooted and almost entirely erased as a result of the nexus of National Heritage and private investment in a way that significantly altered the ways in which working-class identities formed a continuous historical connection with those spaces. As Arthur Aughey suggests, the conceptual return to a distant past enacts "the transformation of England from an industrial and military power into a heritage theme park" (162).<sup>10</sup> Keeping this in mind, I

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<sup>9</sup> Margaret Thatcher used the Falklands War as a tool for reinvigorating a sense of patriotism and national pride in the early 1980s, thus attempting to subvert the post-Suez national decline that was felt throughout the late 1960s and 1970s. As Tom Nairn points out, while the first half of Thatcher's term as Prime Minister was the most unpopular British government since 1939, racial and economic struggles, and the sense of national decline vanished when, on April 3, 1982, a year after the Brixton riots, the Falklands War began (Hall, et al, "Politics of Thatcher" 283).

<sup>10</sup> While Aughey does not name specific examples, Julian Barnes's *England England* takes the criticism of theme-parking English heritage to its comically bitter conclusion. In Barnes' novel, the theme park "England England" is located on an island off the coast of the "real" England and attempts to gain recognition by

will touch on the example of the Docklands development in East London as I discuss the ways in which the revitalization and internationalization of historic spaces became the cure for, as Lord Heseltine suggested at the time, inner-city decay. The first section of this chapter, then, looks at the ways in which the national investment in heritage, particularly in its focus on architecture and landscape, attempted to inject British cities with spatial representations of a prescribed historical national identity. As such, this investigation incorporates the theories of Stuart Hall, John Corner and Sylvia Harvey, Robert Colls, Robert Hewison, Raphael Samuel, Patrick Wight, and Bill Schwarz in order to uncover the ways that the increasing attention, both financial and cultural, given to heritage throughout the 1980s not only altered urban landscapes but also affected the ways in which citizens living within those landscapes were shifted and gentrified by a return to a temporally distant, and specifically English, exclusionary history and identity.

In the second half of the chapter I then turn to Sinclair's *Lights Out for the Territory* in order to examine the significant relationship Sinclair foregrounds amongst local sociocultural histories revenant in the architecture and spaces of urban communities. Sinclair's work explores the way that Thatcherite policies of privatization, coupled with the British heritage industry, complicated, manufactured, and remapped English identity for profit (both political and financial). *Lights Out for the Territory* re-imagines the scalar narrative of local spaces of the East End of London as a counterpoise to National Heritage's attempt to hijack and, in turn, erase the legacy of local working-class identities. With this in mind, and in order to uncover the foci of Sinclair's urban heritage narrative, I examine his use of the trope of the map as a means of writing the city: a kind of reclamation of a distant

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international governing bodies, while the actual British Isles regress to a primitive state before technology and global trade. Essentially, the original British Isles become that which the theme park attempts to emulate.

and now fragmented past eroded by the firestorm of Thatcherite free market economics and the creeping death of community. Ultimately, I argue that *Lights Out for the Territory* mythologizes, and at the same time makes impossible, a singularly authentic mapping of the spaces of London.

### **Heritage and National Identity: Theme-parked Identities and the Erasure of the Unmarketable**

While a particular discourse of British heritage has been around for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Samuel), the late 1970s and, in particular, the 1980s saw a surge in the activity of heritage preservation as the Thatcher government sought to subvert the feeling of national decline that had prevailed in Britain since the Suez crisis - something Thatcher coined the “Suez syndrome” (Thatcher, *Downing Street* 8).<sup>11</sup> The National Heritage Acts of 1980 and 1983 exemplified the Tory preoccupation with resurrecting a patriotic and culturally significant historical national identity through a particular focus on material representations of that history.<sup>12</sup> The acts provided the funds and basic infrastructure for securing and restoring various landmarks, artifacts, and buildings to a historical time period that

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<sup>11</sup> Despite the rise in patriotism in the period immediately after World War Two, the years following the end of the war saw the liquidation of the British Empire, most notably with the independence of India in 1947. The psychological effect of the retreating empire came to an apex in 1956 when the Suez crisis marked, as Peter Mandler suggests, “the last point at which Britain enjoyed true national unity” (197). The decline of Britain was precipitated by a global perception of its failure as a world power, and so it was only when the global perception of Britain changed that British identity changed in Britain as well. As Chester L. Cooper suggests, “in the aftermath of Suez, most British recognized the new reality: The days when their country could play a major, *independent* international role were over. An era had come to a close” (265-266). The feeling of decline permeated the British population throughout the post-war period and into the 1980s. It is this far-reaching feeling that Thatcher coined “the Suez syndrome.”

<sup>12</sup> For an in-depth investigation of the sociohistorical significance of heritage in Britain beyond my focus of 1980s urban space, refer to Raphael Samuel’s *Theatres of Memory* where he looks at the pre and post-war periods as the idea of heritage was encountered, taken up, and disputed by critics on both the Right and the Left.

represented a politically desirable English identity (Corner and Harvey; Hall “Local/Global”; Samuel).

However, while many heritage spaces and landscapes were publicly funded, they were often left in private hands to restore. For many Britons, “‘national heritage’ [had] become something of a national obsession, even though no one [was] sure what it mean[t]” (Colls 356). The National Heritage website defines the protocol for establishing heritage spaces. Specifically, the four values that are considered in establishing a heritage site include: “evidential value,” relating to specifically significant architectural design and construction; “historic value,” meaning that the building was constructed at a pivotal point in British history, or the way in which the building was used or inhabited in some way contributes to a historical understanding of English identity; “aesthetic value”; and “communal values,” referring to spaces intended to contribute to ideas of community (often these were “experiments in social housing” such as “Trellick Tower” or Park Hill).<sup>13</sup> As I argue in the second part of this chapter, Sinclair’s writing works to oppose the “pivotal point” of historic value that National Heritage focuses on as he looks to a continuous transformation of space through time.

However, as Sinclair positions the discursive practices of the heritage industry as the nexus of *Lights Out for the Territory*, the sociopolitical *meaning* of heritage remains a contentious point. Stuart Hall defines heritage as “the whole complex of organizations, institutions and practices devoted to the preservation and presentation of culture and the arts

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<sup>13</sup> It should be noted here that the views of English Heritage do not always coincide with the British, and often global, architectural community when it comes to which buildings to list and which ones to demolish. An example of this conflict is the Robin Hood estate in East London. The debate is particularly interesting because, as the BBC reports, many individuals who live there wish to see the buildings demolished, while the architects fight to keep, and restore, the structure. Critics have suggested that once the building is brought down, new high-end condominiums will be built and those people who have lived in Robin Hood estate will be relocated. See “Row over ‘street in sky’ estate.”

– art galleries, specialist collections, public and private, museums of all kinds ... and sites of special historical interest” (“Whose Heritage?” 23). For Hall, the idea of heritage is caught up not only in the “preservation and presentation of culture and the arts” but also in the modes by which they come to be preserved. Historical national identity, then, became institutionalized through “organizations, institutions and practices.” It was particularly during Thatcher’s reign that “the word ‘heritage’ [became] the principal label for a variety of often very different evocations, projections and embodiments of national and local ‘pastness’ and pride” (Corner and Harvey 48). The “organizing, and frequent institutionaliz[ation]” of historic national identity and “pride” eventually gave rise, as Corner and Harvey suggest, to “an astonishing growth in historical tourism” (48). However, as both Hall and Corner and Harvey agree, the kind of historical identity that much of the heritage industry wished to promote was an exclusive representation of Englishness that often left out seemingly unmarketable local working-class populations, not to mention diasporic and immigrant identities. As Arthur Aughey suggests, many scholars recognized that the fact that heritage was being used as a tool for economic and political vibrancy was a lesser problem than “Thatcher’s attempt to prescribe the contents” of heritage and, as such, that “history was being hijacked by Thatcherism” (16). In *Lights Out for the Territory*, Sinclair foregrounds such “hijack[ing]” as heritage became a re-signifier and rewriter of British spaces. As Sinclair investigates, while many heritage sites underwent Thatcherite reinvention, the narratives produced around them failed to include, for example, contemporary struggles of class and race. As such, the official heritage narrative invoked a kind of sociocultural amnesia in an effort to write the story that would sell to the most tourists or generate the most desired patriotic form of “imagined” national identity

(Anderson). The past was being reinvented, as Hall suggests, through the Conservative myth founded on neoliberal tenets of the deserving citizen rather than the Labour socialist myth built upon a desire for unionized state support.

The heritage project, then, amounted to the restoration and preservation of the historical significance of specific sites or cultural artifacts that represented a desirable representation of English history and identity (Hall “Whose Heritage?”; Hewison; Wright *Journey*; Corner and Harvey). As David Harvey suggests, the turn to a manufactured national identity

reveal[s] something of a great potential importance because it is indeed the case that the preoccupation with identity, with personal and collective roots, has become far more pervasive since the early 1970s because of the widespread insecurity in labour markets, in technological mixes, credit systems, and the like. (“Postmodernism in the city” 87)

Identity, as the Tories were keen to profit from, was always already spatial. As Smith contends, “it is not just that space and society ‘interact’; a specific historical logic (that of capital accumulation) guides the historical dialectic of space and society” (*Uneven* 106). In keeping with Thatcherite economic ideals, the raising up and commodification of historical “Englishness” was concomitant with the revitalization of a national identity and economic stability that no longer relied on socialist economics or national industry, but rather on a global economics of tourism and trade that was, at its core, spatial. As Hewison argues,

the “heritage industry” [was] expected to more and more replace the real industry upon which this country’s economy depends. Instead of manufacturing goods, we

are manufacturing heritage, a commodity which nobody seems able to define, but which everybody is eager to sell, in particular those cultural institutions that can no longer rely on government funds as they did in the past. (9)

As far-reaching union strikes, revolts against immigration, recession, inflation, and deindustrialization became hallmarks of British life throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the turn towards heritage as a new national industry that could invoke a sense of shared national past was, arguably, like killing two birds with one stone.<sup>14</sup> Tourist dollars could partially make up for losses from national industry while simultaneously forging a new sense of national pride and identity reinstated by the Tory party. Stuart Hall invokes Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" when he spotlights the significance of a "shared national identity [that] depends on cultural meanings, which bind each member individually into the large national story. ... The National Heritage is a powerful source of such meanings ("Whose Heritage?" 26).

While ideas of exclusion and racism have been part of the British struggle throughout the postwar period, it is the commercial aspect of the "heritage industry" that rewrote English identity for the postmodern era in a way that was, according to Hall (2005), Corner and Harvey, and Schwarz, exclusionary and elitist. The result was the advancement of exclusionary local politics as working-class identities were displaced and gentrified in favour of creating commercially viable tourist destinations. Patrick Wright argues that the National Heritage Acts of 1980 and 1983 were "respectful but commercially-minded" in a way that promoted a "reanimation" of history as "a way forward in [the] new world of theme-parks and mass tourism" (*On Living in an Old Country* 150). Similar to the way that

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<sup>14</sup> For more on issues of recession, civil unrest, and striking labour unions during this period, see Black, and Hall, et al.

Sinclair spatially locates the continuous histories of local identities in the streets and architecture of the East End of London and beyond, Wright suggests that the theme-parking of English heritage resulted in the “abandoning of the idea of historical and traditional continuity” in a way that created a space for “the past [to continue] to exist in the present, but [that] it does so in discontinuity with modern social reality” (150). In this sense, displaced identities became revenant figures whose spatiohistorical identities were all but exorcised as buildings and local communities were torn down, or *restored* beyond working-class economic reach.

Numerous theorists (Hall; Hewison; Corner and Harvey) have argued that the installation of heritage with a capital “H” has caused a rift in the sociocultural network of contemporary British society. Raphael Samuel, on the other hand, has suggested that the labour opportunities created by the heritage industry infused local communities, either around or connected to heritage spaces, with jobs and purpose. However, while it is true that *some* working-class people, as Samuel argues, were able to work within the realm of heritage, those who had worked in the spaces that were relocated and gentrified as a result of the development of heritage sites, for example the Docklands in East London, were further marginalized.<sup>15</sup> Thus, as Richard Williams proposes, the establishment and subsequent marketing of English heritage induced a sense of panic and fostered an anxiety of decline in 1980s British urban spaces that resulted in a rupture in the ways in which individual identities formed within British urban spaces, as well as the ways such

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<sup>15</sup> While the “noise of de-industrialization” (Hall “Local/Global” 23) deafened much of the nation, Samuel argues that the heritage industry gave a renewed hope for many working-class individuals who could sell antiques, provide manual labour in the restoration of heritage sites, and create indigenous arts and crafts to sell in open air markets such as the one in Portobello Road. However, the opportunities that existed were for those who possessed particular skills; for those without such skills, “the obsession with identifying and preserving the ‘national heritage’ was very widely cursed as a British disease” (Mandler 233).

individuals were able to identify with the kind national identity certain heritage sites celebrated. Part of this anxiety came from the reassignment of certain spaces to heritage sites that, essentially, erased local history and memory in favour of an official historical and, as heritage advocates would argue, more “authentic” English identity with which many of those who lived in such spaces could not identify. Bill Schwarz takes up this idea in his discussion of what he calls the “Thatcherization of the East End” through the development of the Docklands - a process that Sinclair spotlights in his own discussion of the area (81). While not specifically focusing on a particular building as a heritage site, the invasion of free market ideals into the East End/Docklands played upon historical heritage that “trades on images” in order to deploy “a very particular idea of what, now, the East End is” (78). The East End of London became (and, as a result of the 2012 summer Olympics, continues to become, as Sinclair investigates in his most recent text, *Ghost Milk*) a giant development where new architecture meets with heritage sites such as ancient public houses in a way that pushes out local working-class identities while attracting new young middle-class professionals.<sup>16</sup>

As Paul Newland notes, “the East End has been reinforced as a spatial idea within the bourgeois imagination through ongoing discourse that has marked it as a terra incognita, as a dark, dangerous, degenerate, exotic space” that can only be truly understood as a cultural historical artifact rather than contemporary reality (2). Historically, the East End has been imagined, as Tom Nairn and Linda Colley have argued, as “unknowable” and “Other” in light of, for example, the Victorian slums of Dickens’s time, the legacy of Jack the Ripper, and more recently the decay and ruin of council estates and tower block housing and the subsequent rise in crime and drug abuse. Harnessing the powerful past of the East

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<sup>16</sup> For more on the impact of the 2012 Olympics on local communities, see Sinclair *London Review of Books*.

End while at the same time sanitizing it enough for tourist consumption and middle-class occupation was accomplished by making such “Other” spaces more understandable and accessible. As Stuart Hall asserts, heritage was unable to create a cohesive national identity inclusive of contemporary British populations because it harkened back to an imperial era that was constructed in opposition to the Other – an Other that was now living within most British communities. Imperial and colonial identity, as Nairn and Colley assert, was always constructed through a negative relationship to the Other.

As Sinclair spotlights in *Lights Out for the Territory*, in order to make the East End marketable, heritage attempted to erase such Other histories. Schwarz imagines the local working-class identity as erased in precisely such ways when he draws attention to the disenfranchised “East London broken-backed dockers [who] possess[ed a] distinctive hunch ... [now] sitting in fold-up chairs on little squares of grass, gently nodding to the rhythmic thud of pile drivers. Unless they can dance a jig or produce a quick line in the muvver tongue they are *not* Heritage” (83). One wonders, as Schwarz does, what these kinds of identities were meant to do if they could not participate in either the new heritage or their old industrial roles.<sup>17</sup>

As Corner and Harvey posit, heritage “attempts to promote the dissolution, or at least the temporary forgetting, of radical differences and inequalities and to do so in the interests of celebrated unity” (50). Yet, as Schwarz demonstrates, the reality of heritage

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<sup>17</sup> As Schwarz goes on to suggest, there is an intimate connection between the breaking up of the unions and the gentrification of working-class identities. As striking unions became disenfranchised through unemployment, the individuals within those unions became spatially, and as a result historically, uprooted: “One of the more notable victories of the Thatcherites in the eighties lay not only in the final liquidation, as a historic force, of those unions based in old staple industries of the first industrial revolution but also in effectively expunging even their memory from public comment” (82). While the Tories were involved in breaking up the unions, the “heritage industry” was working to erase the identities of unionized workers from the recent memory of English identity spatially rooted in working-class neighborhoods.

fails to create any sense of “celebrated unity.” Stuart Hall asks: “who is Heritage for? In the British case the answer is clear. It is intended for those who ‘belong’ – a society which is imagined as, in broad terms, culturally homogenous and unified” (“Whose Heritage?” 26).

As Schwarz further suggests, the heritage industry

mystifies the history of the riverside in East London by eliminating reference to one of its central constituents – the human labour of the dockers. The *place* – archetypal, rooted in the first Elizabethan age, boasting the oldest pubs in the land, etc. – predominates over the human, transmuting in the process to heritage. (82)

The developers of Docklands that have been funded by global capital (specifically the Canadian firm Olympia and York) have sought to attract a particular wealthy demographic while avoiding any meaningful representation of the present-day inhabitants of the area, thus displacing them not only through redevelopment but also through the Elizabethan myth spatially resurrected through heritage.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, it is not surprising that Sinclair refers to the Docklands project, and its bankrupt failure, as “the cemetery of Thatcherism” (*Lights Out* 40).

Emily Richardson’s *Transit* (2006), a seven-minute film overdubbed by a collage of anecdotes by Sinclair, seeks, as Paul Newland suggests, to “document what has been lost in east London” (14). The fractals of space and memory that make up Richardson’s images, and the vibrational layering of Sinclair’s narrative, eerily reflect the loss and disappearance of local identity within those spaces. In keeping with *Lights Out for the Territory*, the film

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<sup>18</sup> Key to the Elizabethan myth was the integral role that the Docklands area had in turning London into a shipping and economic hub. As Stephen Inwood reports, during the Elizabethan period, “London was transformed ... into a major international port with trading connections stretching from the East Indies to the New World.” The Elizabethan penchant for world trade and economic prosperity was thus also in line with the Thatcherite desire to “turn the English into a nation of spenders and consumers” (Inwood 202).

emphasizes such loss through Sinclair's layers of fractured narrative lines and Richardson's images of the desolate working-class landscapes that stand in contradistinction to the regeneration of, for example, the Docklands area of East London. Richardson's long shots of streets with various litter and detritus, uninhabited car parks, and boarded up store fronts are almost devoid of faces and people - and the infrequent appearance of an individual makes their greater absence stark in contrast. As Newland remarks, as the "material, 'real' east London ... began to change," Tory supported "regeneration did not always seem suited to the needs of local people" (187).

The influx of capital into the area meant that the spaces with which local unemployed working-class individuals identified themselves were either erased or forever changed. *Transit* thus represents and produces the East London neighborhood at a crucial moment of transition (hence the title *Transit*), while Sinclair's narrative further disorients our expectations of a linear narrative flow by demonstrating the halted and halting historical layers disrupted and paused through the abrupt gentrification and privatization imminent in the area. The voices are still there, but they are complicated and layered, always changing. It is along analogous lines that Sinclair's *Lights Out for the Territory* traces the history of similar disenfranchised identities as they move and shift as a result of the influx of capital and heritage into the East End of London.

Robert Colls echoes Richardson and Sinclair's illustration of loss at the selling off of "authentic" working-class historical English identity in a way that suggests notions of nostalgia and desires for authenticity are not only the concern of the right:

however well it is made and however readily it is marketed, national heritage is usually only about a past that has gone for good. Rarely is it valued for bearing on

the present, let alone for what it has to say about the qualities of the English people, though it might be that current obsessions are recognition that something fundamental has changed – that a line has been crossed. (357)

Colls draws attention to the popular “recognition,” specifically in the 1980s, of “a past that has gone for good” - a loss evident through the perceptible shift, a “fundamental ... change,” in the popular understanding that Orwellian Englishness faced extinction in an increasingly diverse British society.<sup>19</sup> Peter Mandler argues that this feeling of decline and loss began even before Enoch Powell’s infamous Rivers of Blood speech in 1968: “there was a strong feeling on the Left and on the individualist New Right - which we will see resurfacing in the ‘heritage’ neurosis of the 1980s - that talk about ‘national identity’ was code for a reactionary nostalgia for past imperial glories or a cosy, rural Englishness” (227).<sup>20</sup> The “obsession” with looking back to an identity stuck in the mists of a nostalgic imperial past inevitably, as Colls suggests, also points to the stark fact that Englishness as a national identity still carries a colonizing power able to exclude any contemporary identities that do not have the economic or social status to participate. Colls further argues that, as such, the “bearing on the present” of National Heritage was mostly felt as a wide-spread

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<sup>19</sup> Orwellian English identity is taken up with activities such as gardening, “stamp-collecting,” “darts,” “the pub,” “football,” “the fireside,” and the ubiquitous “cup of tea” (Orwell 75-79). Spatially, Orwell’s English character is also deeply rooted in the local and the ways in which pubs and other public spaces were occupied and used.

<sup>20</sup> Enoch Powell delivered his notorious “Rivers of Blood” speech to Conservative constituents in Birmingham in April 1968. The speech attacked immigration, specifically the Race Relations Act of the same year, as responsible for increasing crime and violence in city centres across Britain, as well as being an imminent threat to English (particularly working-class) identity and opportunity. In his speech, Powell declared it was his responsibility as a British MP to draw attention to what he saw as the inevitable and “total transformation of British society of which there was no parallel in British history.” He not only called for a halt on immigration to “negligible levels,” but argued also that a policy of “re-emigration” should be installed in order to stop what he envisioned as the “nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre” (Powell). I discuss Powell’s speech more fully in Chapter 3.

alienation and disenfranchisement of large working-class populations in areas changed in the name of National Heritage. Despite Raphael Samuel's insistence that the heritage industry created opportunity for working-class labourers and craftspeople (245), the backlash from many critics, most notably Hewison and Wright (*Journey*), has been that as more and more museums, country houses, and urban buildings are restored in the celebration of national heritage, and the desire from tourists to view them increases, the result has been an intense shift towards the marketing and commercialization of English history at the expense of not only displaced local working-class populations, but also black and Asian identities completely left out of the heritage framework (Hewison).<sup>21</sup>

Echoing the semi-fictional conceit of Sinclair's text, Corner and Harvey agree with Hall that heritage "attempts to promote the dissolution, or at least the temporary forgetting, of radical differences and inequalities ... in the interests of celebrated unity" (50). In this sense, "the heritage industry [was] an attempt to dispel this climate of decline by exploiting the economic potential of our culture, and it finds a ready market because the perception of decline includes all sorts of insecurities and doubts" (Hewison 9-10). Such insecurities and doubts were often projected onto working-class and diasporic identities occupying areas like the East End, marking them as "Other," as Nairn and Colley would argue. In doing so, the process of their disenfranchisement could be rationalized as progress rather than privatized exclusivity because it sought to colonize the spaces once imagined similar to Conrad's "heart of darkness." David Harvey frames the cultural significance and

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<sup>21</sup> However, in recent years there has been increasing attention paid to the historical and architectural significance of mosques and other faith-based sites in Britain. A 2007 English Heritage pamphlet states that "mosque specialists among the architectural profession (e.g., Atba Al-Samarraie of Archi-Structure) are now emerging. A new generation of mosques and places of Muslim worship [have marked] the beginnings of indigenous mosque architecture [in Britain. These buildings and sites] may be candidates for consideration among the listed buildings of the future." With this in mind, this subject would do well with a revisit in the next 15 years once these buildings are marked as culturally significant by English Heritage.

relationship of Hewison's "heritage industry" as distinctly postmodern when he says that "it has, unfortunately, proved impossible to separate postmodernism's penchant for historical quotation and populism from the simple task of catering, if not pandering, to nostalgic impulses" ("Postmodernism in the City" 87). Colonizing the "Other" reinforced a sense of imperial Englishness - yet the contemporary targets were Thatcher's "enemy within" rather than distant foreign populations and spaces. As a riposte to Thatcherite nostalgia, Sinclair's novel works to reproduce and represent the often-unmarketable English/British histories and identities, and spatializes them in the past, in the present, or the future of British urban spaces. Sinclair's work, then, is also a kind of heritage project that, rather than ignoring sociopolitical struggles in order to keep the heritage project clean and marketable, imagines a socially and politically fragmented urban past, present, and future haunting the streets and architectural landscapes of London. In doing so, Sinclair approaches the "line [that] has been crossed", as Colls puts it, and attempts to map through his urban observations what that line represents.

### **"Nothing is erased": Sinclair's Urban Tracings**

*Lights Out for the Territory* traces various commercially driven alterations to the spaces of London, and the identities that live, and have lived, there as they are inscribed, and made legible, on the surfaces of the city. Sinclair's London is made up of various and multiple histories and fictions nestled in and around a present day version of itself. In this sense, the text scratches the surface of local, forgotten, and seemingly unmarketable identities and spaces in an attempt to subvert the Thatcherite heritage project of hijacking English identity. Sinclair's focus in *Lights Out for the Territory*, while it takes into account the broader history of London from Roman times until the present, rests specifically on the

dramatic spatial shifts that occurred as a result of Thatcherite policies of privatization. Inasmuch as the British sociopolitical urban landscape was forever altered in the wake of World War Two, the next major sociospatial schism, as Sinclair documents, was deeply tied to the Thatcherite rolling back of the welfare state, a far-reaching rift that continues in contemporary British politics.

Sinclair points to St. Paul's Cathedral as an example of the history of capitalization in the City: "Staying faithful to the free-market flag of convenience under which Old St. Paul's always sailed.[...] St. Paul's was the Thatcherite temple: the blue and the grey, the arms deal struck in a congregation giving thanks for victory" (*Lights Out* 127). Here Sinclair identifies one of the "most important of the City's focal points" (126) as a symbol of the relationship between the state and "free-market ... convenience" that makes plain the worship of Thatcherite economic policies (127). While many tourists visit St. Paul's as a site of worship, Sinclair draws attention to another history of the cathedral that venerates capitalist, rather than religious, tenets. Sinclair imagines the cathedral as "a crypt stacked with plunder, grails and robes and effigies ... Swooning with reverence, the patsies buy their tickets for the ascent to the rim of the dome, the small circuit that offers up the entire city" (127). Sinclair implicates capitalist interventions in the assignation of the cathedral as a space for pecuniary worship, as well as for the tourists who come to buy a piece of "the small circuit that offers up the entire city." The relationship Sinclair establishes between historical significance and the production of wealth is, as he declares, indicative of "the ultimate heritage operation" (127).

Yet while Sinclair criticizes National Heritage for focusing on specific sites as spatial representations of English identity, he too traces these same sites. As Newland

argues, “[m]ajor buildings and monuments in the city can act as agents of memory ... as markers of the city’s fabric, as well as visible reference points and aids to navigation through the labyrinthine city text” (“On an Eastern Arc”). Newland suggests that “Sinclair speculates that Christ Church has not only witnessed horrific and uncanny events but has also, somehow, absorbed them or reproduced them” (“Eastern Arc”). They are spatially scaled and rescaled as Sinclair documents such “horrific” and “uncanny” events as always existing. Noting the intensification of the relationship between space, the state, the individual, and history, as he sees it represented in immensely popular and highly marketed sites such as St. Paul’s Cathedral, Sinclair composes a history of London’s East End in a way that salvages what he imagines as a rich and varied, and most notably always changing and difficult to define, English history. Such history, as it is “absorbed ... or reproduced,” is retrievable through a spatial analysis that echoes Lefebvre’s “production of space” as deeply social. The mode by which National Heritage has reworked and remodeled sites deemed sociohistorically significant, as in, as already discussed, the almost complete reconceptualization of Docklands in the East End, engages an exclusionary social engineering that lacks, as Sinclair observes, any care or understanding of what Colls calls “a bearing on the present” (356).

Sinclair’s demonstration, in this sense, works through struggles amongst different fictions through his always changing spatiohistorical record. The privatization of traditionally working-class spaces, via “off-shore investors” and “short-term profit takers” in spaces such as the Docklands, reduces “every artifact [investors] can get out of the ground” to potential economic gain and leaves little, if any, room for the historical

palimpsest that Sinclair works towards recovering.<sup>22</sup> As Smith notes, “for Lefebvre, urban space is the space in which the final episodes of the capitalists drama are being played out” (*Uneven* 123). While space and place may not move in a physical sense, the “transformation of space” is directly allied with the surge of social, political and economic struggles that occur in and through space (Swyngedouw 144). It is the “transformation of space,” the understanding that sociopolitical significances of space must be understood as an ongoing process, that is directly taken up in Sinclair’s project.

Newland points out that “Sinclair’s territorial excavations usually take place to the east of London, or, more accurately, in a discursively constructed space that has become known as the East End” (“Eastern Arc”). The East End had come to be mythologized, “discursively constructed,” in the imagination of those in the West of London rather than seen as an actual place with spaces and identities. In this context, Sinclair’s approach brings to the fore not only the historical significance of various urban spaces, but also the often gritty and politically conflicted oppositions that have haunted, and continue to haunt, such spaces. Arguably, Sinclair’s movement between St. Paul’s and the East End enacts a significant dialectic relationship between the two spaces. One is left to wonder if the East End would exist in the same manner that it does now without the opposing space of, for example, St. Paul’s. As Newland argues, Sinclair’s

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<sup>22</sup> Sinclair imagines a Dante-esque ringed city of access and exclusion in the three zones he maps out. The “inner zone is available only to a hierarchy of workers, priests and functionaries. Its palaces are studded with defensive imagery, iron gates built on fascist scale” (*Lights Out* 100). The “inner zone” is perhaps represented by the first map, entitled “City” in *Lights Out for the Territory*. The second “outer” zone, made of “motion, a treadmill of commuters to drive the invisible engines of business” invokes a kind of Eliotian “wasteland” of industrial sociocultural intervention (101). I would suggest that his work mostly represents the third zone: “the third, and most intriguing, of the discriminations is the interzone - which is neither office nor street. The zone where everything is permitted that is not forbidden” (101).

focus falls on the East End because of the irrational, uncanny space that exists in the imaginative opposition to the rational, policed and controlled financial heart of the City of London and a West End that remains home to the seat of government, royal palaces and sites of tourism and consumerism. (“Eastern Arc”)

Sinclair “mythologizes a new gallery of East End types” that includes, as Peter Brooker lists, “the Kray twins patrolling their manor, survivors of the ‘swinging sixties’, minor personalities of showbiz and the criminal underground, itinerant bibliophiles, out-of-print pulp writers, sometime movie-makers, anarchists, avant-gardist poets and artists” (98). Sinclair portrays, and spatializes, these seditious identities and histories as a kind of riposte to the Thatcherite forgetting and erasing of these same identities through the intensification of, for example, St. Paul’s as a tourist destination, or the commercialization of the East End. Throughout his text, then, Sinclair enacts Soja’s theory that it is “space more than time that hides consequences from us, the ‘making of geography’ more than the ‘making of history’ that provides the most revealing tactical and theoretical world” (Soja 1).

Sinclair’s composition in *Lights Out for the Territory* is subversive in its often-fragmented narrative that is not unlike, I would suggest, the experience of wandering through the city. Composed amidst the wavering and flickering layers of history in space, Sinclair moves beyond the simple practice of walking through the city and writing, as de Certeau might argue, a personal urban narrative, as he re-maps and rewrites the city through walks that “uncover [...] marginal traces of London’s culture, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to assert itself” (*Lights Out* 10). In this sense, Sinclair’s work is a locally-focused (East End) heritage-like project that looks to the edges of society, the identities and spaces that had been cast off by Thatcherism as dirty, uneconomically viable,

as it seeks to “make visible an alternative history embedded in an unseen layer of the city [through ...] psychic excursions across London that make up [his] riposte to Thatcherism” (Brooker 105).

While others such as Geoffrey Fletcher have produced post-war non-fiction urban narratives, such as his London-trivia *London Nobody Knows*, Sinclair’s narrative differs in that it traces a “transitory and temporary” “weightiness” of spatiohistorical antecedents connected by his walks and pauses through the city, and, in this way, “link[s...] discrete sites [in a way that] could manifest some miraculous whole, complete with the gears and bearings of the secret machine” (*Lights Out* 129). While Fletcher draws attention to points of historical interest, Sinclair works through the poetics of such interest-points by noting and exploring the sinews that string up between them:

walking is the best way to explore and exploit the city; the changes, shifts, breaks in the cloud helmet, movement of light on water. Drifting purposefully is the recommended mode, tramping asphalted earth in alert reverie, allowing the fiction of an underlying pattern to reveal itself. [...] the born again *flaneur* is a stubborn creature, less interested in texture and fabric, eavesdropping on philosophical conversation pieces, than in noticing *everything*. (*Lights Out* 4)

Sinclair rewrites the Baudelairean flaneur for the postmodern era as his attention, and intention, as a walker, or “stalker,” is taken up with history and place in a way that the textiles and gossip of the “arcades” reflect and embody history and place. The “*everything*” Sinclair notices includes:

alignments of telephone kiosks, maps made from moss on the slopes of Victorian sepulchers, collections of prostitutes' cards, [...] visits to the homes of dead writers, [...] meditations on the brain damage suffered by the super middleweight boxer Gerald McClellan [...] and the simultaneous collapse of Barings, bankers to the queen. (*Lights Out 4*)

Rather than imagining urban accessories such as phone boxes and fingerposts as markers of an Orwellian English character and identity, Sinclair locates their significance as deeply dialectic to surrounding spaces, accessories, and identities. Their meaning, then, is derived not from their individual existence, but rather from the dialectic relationship between them.

As Lefebvre theorizes, “social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves on one another” (*Production 86*). Sinclair makes the case that “walking, moving across a retreating townscape, stitches it all together: the illicit cocktail of bodily exhaustion and a raging carbon monoxide high” (*Lights Out 4*). Baker declares that Sinclair’s “city is itself inscribed by language, [and] its linguistic materiality and legibility is invoked by the presence of the drifting subject” (“Maps of London Underground”). In this sense he becomes a kind of tailor of the urban, employing text and language to “stitch” together fragmented histories relative to other sites/histories/identities. As Sinclair declares in his 1991 novel *Downriver*, his work is like “time travel without the hardware” (18). While he joins, or stitches, he is also always already enacting a “phantom biopsy, cutting out a sample of diseased tissue without an anesthetic” (*Lights Out 4*). Inasmuch as he documents the spaces through which he walks, he also alters, dissects and stitches together again their spatiohistorical significance through the very act of documentation.

*Lights Out for the Territory* thus gestures at the inherent irony of National Heritage projects that seek to locate a specific, and temporally static, historical identity rooted in space. For example, as a consequence of Thatcher's deregulation of publicly funded social programs and housing, many British city streets (such as those in Brixton during the riots of May 1981) became sites of fervent resistance and, as Stuart Hall suggests, venues for "the emergence of new subjects, new genders, new ethnicities, new regions, [and] new communities" ("Old and New Identities" 34). Sinclair thus inscribes on to the surface of the city Lefebvre's layered definition of the urban as always already struggling and changing as a result of sociopolitical pressures and flows. Sinclair oscillates between documenting textual inscriptions on the city in the form of graffiti and tagging that serve to subvert ideas of property ownership, and other inscriptions that occur as a result of CCTVs and other forms of panoptic monitoring. Invoking Foucault's spatialized narrative of observation and punishment, Sinclair articulates the kinds of technological interventions that seek to also write the city for the postmodern era.

The technological intervention of CCTV and surveillance monitoring rewrites and remaps the city in a way that makes every individual in the city a potential criminal and/or victim. As a result, the urban spaces that are mapped out by CCTV (which in contemporary London means almost the entire city) invoke an expectation of violence and fear. The urban struggle, as Lefebvre would agree, is taken up with the struggle of crime and punishment at the same time that various social strategies within the urban clash. The cameras make forgetting impossible, and so the city is always made image through "a discreet tyranny of 'now'" (*Lights Out* 91). Sinclair makes the case for a poetic possibility in and through CCTV technology when he says that "it is only when there is no one to watch the watchers,

when the machines are left to house imagery on the banked screens in an empty room, that a melancholy futurist poetic begins to operate” (91). He imagines CCTV as a “new art form: the City is at last able to compose its own poetry, with no human intervention” (92). Through surveillance technology the spaces of the city are recorded and organized, juxtaposed, and mapped, as it were, without “human intervention,” in the interests of privatized protection. Since the city can potentially “compose its own poetry,” Sinclair notes a tenor of nostalgia in the loss of the layers of local history to intense redevelopment and the technological intervention of surveillance policing of those spaces.

However, I would argue that Sinclair’s text rails against such a feeling of redundancy in terms of his role as a poet/novelist/urban transcriber/stalker. Sinclair sees the city as a text to be transcribed, and such transcription cannot merely be accomplished by CCTV but rather must be articulated in concert with other modes of documentation.<sup>23</sup> Such apparatuses of transcription become part of that which is transcribed. However, as Benjamin discovers in his *Arcades Project*, transcription is always already changing and fluctuating depending on the individual transcriber (even Sinclair himself documents different layers of the same spaces over time), and in this sense the transcription is less reliable, perhaps even schizophrenic, in relation to the kind of imagist poetry that CCTV cameras produce.

For Sinclair, there is a “real” city that exists outside of the “forests of surveillance cameras,” but that “real” city is always fleeting and changing (*Lights Out* 105). It is the very fact that it is always changing that makes it “real.” Sinclair imagines, in this way, that “the City resisted us” (107). That resistance, where “there was no centre,” implicates all of

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<sup>23</sup> Patrick Keiller also investigates this relationship of observation and composition in his films *London* and *Robinson in Space*.

“us” as intimately part of the urban narrative. As Newland argues, it is this “real” city that Sinclair uncovers that acts in “imaginative opposition” to the sterile Thatcherite City (“Eastern Arc”). It is here, too, that Sinclair notes that the social is always spatialized in order to be documented and understood.

### **Ephemeral Transcriptions of the Urban**

Sinclair challenges National Heritage’s appropriation and selection of certain landscapes and sites as a means of reproducing a desired, and profitable, type of English identity that excludes the vast majority of people. As he writes in *Lights Out for the Territory*, “we fix the future to rewrite the past” (77). Arguably, then, Sinclair revises Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community” by writing an intensely inclusive history of London’s urban space that has, as its broad commonality, diversity. Anderson proposes that the nation “is an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (5-6). It is “*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the imagined of the communion” (6). Though members of the community may be distant and disparate, they are linked together through their ability to imagine a distinct community. In the case of Britain, this meant that the individual Briton was always able to conceptualize himself as part of the British Empire, and the colonial effort the empire was so taken up with, even if he were stationed in Ceylon or India because of his role as a British subject, and his belief in that role.

In this sense, Anderson suggests that “it is imaged as *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (6). Sinclair employs this kind of

“imagined community” to suggest that the mere act of living in the city, of moving through the urban spaces of London, and as a result also forever altering and changing those spaces through such diverse transgressions, creates a common experience amongst individuals within those spaces. Sinclair’s engagement with his own heritage project thus attempts to unseat the most manufactured of National Heritage sites in order to rewrite a kind of inclusively rogue local heritage rooted in space. Further, Sinclair is also “fix[ing] the future” in a way that attempts to *write* and not “rewrite the past.” The past, for Sinclair, has a kind of revenance, the “echoes and voices” that haunt the spaces of London.

The very title *Lights Out for the Territory* itself “plays historically and topographically on a certain haunting instability” in a way that invokes not only the colonial history of London, but also enacts “what amounts to a political diagnosis of Thatcher’s London” (Wolfreys 8). Sinclair’s title troubles the relationship between state and space, revoking the possibility of sight, or vision, within such a relationship. As Joe Painter reminds us, “the concept of territory has been intimately associated with the spatiality of the state for at least 500 years” (1094).<sup>24</sup> Turning the “lights out” unsettles the colonial myth that the sun never sets on the empire (a colonial belief that Thatcher had tried to reenact in response to the Falklands war).<sup>25</sup> Similar to the sense of loss that haunts the heritage

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<sup>24</sup> Painter goes on to further define the kinds of assumptions we make about the concept of territory: “territories are in principle demarcated by clear boundaries rather than amorphous frontiers. Territories do not overlap. The spatial extent of state sovereignty is coterminous with territory. State power is exercised uniformly across territory, and the boundary marks a radical rupture in the nature and intensity of power” (1095). For a further discussion of the sociopolitical nuances relative to the concept of territory, see Painter.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Wright also examines the significance of lights and territory in his examination of the Hackney Town Guide, a street-corner cabinet with a “map [...] perforated with little holes harbouring tiny light bulbs” where the user selects his or her destination by pressing the appropriate button that, in turn, lights up the same space on a map. The map, a relic of 1950s Hackney, has become derelict and has stood “unnoticed for forty years” only to “find new life as the map of a world on which the lights have gone down” (*Journey* 3-4).

industry as a whole, Sinclair indicates the ghostly presence of colonialism and the landscapes and spaces (territories) it previously dominated.

No longer bright, shining, or luminary, the territory has been extinguished and, thus, can only ever be copied and marketed through the kinds of simulation National Heritage works in and through:

Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance [...] the territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory - *precession of simulacra*. It is the map that engenders the territory [...] it is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the empire, but our own. The desert of the real. (Baudrillard 145)

Through his textualization of space, Sinclair imagines a kind of Baudrillardian “simulacra” where the sediments of history and space continuously condensate astride other sediments of history and space “which are no longer part of the empire.” Sinclair moves, “lights out” as it were, towards an understanding of the urban spaces of London, and the East End in particular, through his mapping of the ways in which the lights have been extinguished, and, in turn, how the map has become a subjective fiction based on the individual “real” experience. By turning the lights out, Sinclair also frees up the spaces and individual histories and identities within those spaces that had been dominated by the state and labeled as “territory.” As Wolfreys suggests, *Lights Out for the Territory* renders colonial London as “haunting” yet never really there.

The way that *Lights Out for the Territory* resists a predictable narrative flow reflects the fragmented sociospatial layers of the city that Sinclair re-maps and explores. At times,

Sinclair refers to such fragmentation as insane or schizophrenic, what Lefebvre might call “the schizophrenia of society,” imbuing the city with an overwhelming identity crisis (*Urban Revolution* 157). The narrative line is momentarily visible when Sinclair discards his map (and his plan to walk in a “V” across London) in favour of a fragmented, and arguably organic, transgressive mapping of the city-surface through his psychogeographic process. As Brian Baker suggests,

In *Lights Out for the Territory*, Sinclair’s flânerie both decodes and calls into being the signs of the ‘real’ city, the ‘fiction of an underlying pattern’. Sinclair’s city is a sign-system of accretions, a palimpsest. As in Moretti’s critical text and Booth’s maps, his ‘readings’ make the city legible, but there is little attempt to bring these into a single, totalizing vision. (6)

Sinclair, then, subversively engages with the varying and variable historical timelines, what he at times refers to as ley lines, as they intersect across the surfaces of the city in a way that creates a space for “the city’s argument with itself” so that it will not be “discontinued” by English Heritage (*Lights Out* 42). Sinclair thus realizes that what he sees in the city, the spatiotemporal layers that make up his urban experience, are missing from his map: “I can’t connect any of this with the elegant fiction of my map” (44). Edward Soja defines the map as “a geography of simultaneous relations and meanings that are tied together by a spatial, rather than temporal, logic” (1). Sinclair imagines the map as an “elegant fiction” that is made up, and that, as aesthetically pleasing as it may be, does not reflect the actual spaces that he encounters. Such spaces include “washed out streets, without shops or garages or action of any kind [...] lost foothills [...] archipelagos of cloned housing: scraps of parkland, tolerated forest” (*Lights Out* 44). He suggests that the ubiquitous map *London A-*

Z, for example, imagines (and thus also fictionalizes) “the serial city [as] a manageable concept” (44).<sup>26</sup>

Lefebvre imagines the map as an ideological production of space that “is at once a precondition and a result of social superstructures” (*Production* 95-6):

it is not only the codes - the map’s legend, the conventional signs of map-making and map-reading - that are liable to change, but also the objects represented, the lens through which they are viewed, and the scale used. The idea that a small number of maps or even a single (and singular) map might be sufficient can only apply in a specialized area of study whose own self-affirmation depends on isolation from its context. (85-6)

Lefebvre theorizes what Sinclair puts into action in his psychogeographic process.

Sinclair’s map is “a very complex diagram, but one that necessarily involves reduction, abstraction, and extension on a flat, Cartesian plane. The map corresponds to ‘real,’ physical space, but it is not that space, only a reduced (and therefore legible) representation of it” (Baker 121). As Sinclair moves through, and maps, the city he is always already subverting the “single (and singular) map” by also already drawing connections to various layers of space and history that do not lend themselves to any one specific ideological turn.

The first edition of *Lights Out for the Territory*, published by Granta in 1997, includes three maps drawn by Marc Atkins. While the inclusion of a map in any text provides the reader with an expectation of space and place, the absence of the map from

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<sup>26</sup> Our contemporary engagements and interactions with maps and mapping have changed significantly with digital technologies such as GoogleMaps and smart phone applications that allow us to view the actual street view of a space while we are standing in that very same space. Certainly, such street view applications draw specific attention to the temporality of maps and mapping. While this is beyond the focus of my present study, I am interested in the kinds of juxtapositions such new forms of maps and mapping propose to our interaction with the city.

more recent publications, for example the Penguin 2003 edition, draws even more attention to the map as a literary trope.<sup>27</sup> The first two maps in the 1997 edition appear immediately after the table of contents, and as such imply a sense of direction and authority as they lead us into what is inevitably a fragmented and disparate narrative line. The impossibility of scale, as Baker remarks of the maps that appear in other Sinclair works, troubles our expectations of the kinds of sites that are included in a map entitled “City,” thus suggesting an already problematic construction of the space of the city. Our expectation of a map is that it will place a logical framework around space and time, yet Sinclair manipulates our expectations by including, in particular, the two impossible maps at the beginning of the first edition of *Lights Out for the Territory*.

The inclusion of maps in the first edition, and their absence in the later editions, recalls the appearance/inclusion of maps in the later editions of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*. The absence of the map in the first editions of *Mrs. Dalloway* reaffirms the significance of the actual act of walking, as opposed to the mapping out of the city, where the trespass narrative is not dictated by a mapped grid of the city, but rather by the organic flow of the walker in the city. De Certeau further problematizes the appearance of maps in the text:

Walking affirms, suspects, guesses, transgresses, respects, etc the trajectories it ‘speaks’. All modalities play a part in it, changing from step to step and redistributed in proportions, successions, intensities that vary with the moment, the route, the stroller. The indefinable diversity of these operations of utterance. They cannot be

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<sup>27</sup> In *Iain Sinclair*, Baker works from the later 2003 Penguin edition and seems apparently unaware that the 1997 Granta publication includes graphic maps. Certainly, this affects his reading of the text in a significant way.

reduced to any graphic tracing. (107-8)

Sinclair's London cannot be contained within the frames of a map, "any graphic tracing," because the city is written, and takes shape, through a narrative structure that is "redistributed...with the moment, the route, [and] the stroller" (107). However, the titles of the maps ("City," "Walking the 'V'," and "Tate, M16, Lambeth Triangle") possibly direct the reader, *a priori*, to Sinclair's tongue-in-cheek reduction of the city to a predictable pattern. The impossibility of the maps Sinclair includes gestures toward the ridiculousness of trying to map the city without, at the very least, making the ideological intent of the map's designer clear.

Sinclair also draws attention to the absence of individual histories/identities (or the possibility of such histories/identities) in the distinctions he draws between contemporary maps such the *London A-Z* and early maps that often showed pictures of people accessing and moving through the spaces of the city. Sinclair's textualization of the city, as Wolfreys imagines, is a kind of writing of these urban spaces through time by enacting a drift across history rooted in space. As Baker notes, "Sinclair's city is an accreted, occluded fabric of language and signs (literal and semiotic), a 'tangled skein' of cultures, narratives and histories" (6-7) that are impossible to map in the traditional sense. Rather than writing/drawing a map in the graphic sense that *London A-Z* is produced, *Lights Out for the Territory* imagines a map already written on the surface of the city. Sinclair argues that

we have to recognize the fundamental untrustworthiness of maps: they are always pressure group publications. They represent special pleading on behalf of some quango with a subversive agenda, something to sell. Maps are a futile compromise

between information and knowledge. They require a powerful dose of fiction to bring them to life. (*Lights Out* 145)

Sinclair suggests that all maps come with a “subversive agenda” (his own textual mapping not excluded), and so they must be recognized as an inescapably ideological artifact that employs “a powerful dose of fiction” in order to blend “information and knowledge.”

For Sinclair, the map is not a fact, but a representation of “special pleading” - a request to imagine the city with a specific intention. Further, he identifies the use of maps by National Heritage as an ideological tool: “one of the more seductive ephemerals of the heritage industry is the Godfrey Edition of Old Ordinance Survey Maps: a largely Victorian patchwork intended for those ‘who wish to explore London and its history’” (211). He refers to this map, and others like it, as “hard evidence of a past that never existed,” sarcastically asking: “why not extend the tactic to the city and its spurious divisions? Why not exploit and redevelop properties that are in the public domain, vanished streets, lost rivers? Old maps, with all their fictions intact, are lying around like so much out-of-copyright nineteenth-century literature.” Here, Sinclair imagines maps as a directive language. Inasmuch as he imagines the privatization of “the public domain” as part of the driving force of the erasures his text targets, he further makes a connection with the colonization of space imagined through the “patchwork” of these fictional maps of London: “the triumph of nostalgia is completed by the inclusion of a functioning public convenience (Gentlemen only), the kind now converted into subterranean wine bars or sun-bed tanning chambers (on Rosebury Avenue).”<sup>28</sup> Sinclair’s work thus suggests that a map of London is

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<sup>28</sup> The Victorian “public convenience” is a subject of many historic investigations into the urban spaces of London. While there are numerous examples, notably both Patrick Wright and Geoffrey Fletcher also comment on their historical significance.

already written on the streets and spaces of the city – all that needs to be done is to trace the “ley lines” embedded within the sociohistorical sediment of the city (159).

### **Conclusion, or After the Lights Dim**

Sinclair writes a kind of affect into the textual map of London. His insistence on juxtaposition, the idea that identities and spaces in London are not in isolation but always in relation to each other, is part of the revenance that Wolfreys identifies, and other novelists such as Will Self work through.<sup>29</sup> Such juxtaposition enacts what Eve Sedgwick proposes as a necessary ingredient in an understanding of affect when, as Marla Morris reports of Sedgwick’s work, the “world of affect is not the world of propositions, it is the world of beside” (Morris 264). In this way, Sinclair is also documenting the kinds of dialectic geographies that Doreen Massey encounters throughout her engagement with British urban spaces.<sup>30</sup> While National Heritage works towards invoking a feeling of nostalgia and pride through heritage sites frozen in time, the juxtaposition of space and histories that “echo” through the spaces that Sinclair represents is an affective mapping of London that, in itself, is a less marketable nostalgic re-imagining of streets and architecture of the city.

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<sup>29</sup> Sinclair’s interest in the “palimpsest” of the spatial histories of the East End finds some similarity in Will Self’s *How the Dead Live*, where the city is full of revenant figures that reside alongside the living. While Self’s novel traces the lives of the dead in the derelict spaces of Dalston, Sinclair, as Wolfreys, Baker, and Seale agree, writes the living history of the city, in many ways inscribes it, with a sociocultural patina that is always already located in the present. The record of the urban spatiohistorical is, for Sinclair, rooted in the writing of the city.

<sup>30</sup> As Massey suggests, “if space is a product of practices, trajectories, interrelations, if we make space through interactions at all levels, from the (so-called) local to the (so-called) global, then those spatial identities such as places, regions, nations, and the local and the global, must be forged in this relational way too, as internally complex, essentially unboundable in any absolute sense, and inevitably historically changing” (“Geographies of Responsibility” 5)

Wolfreys suggests that “Sinclair’s punctuations sketch invisible relations, and thus open onto other histories, to specific events often irrelevant to that historical event on which the narrative latches initially” (9). As a result, the London that Sinclair maps out is never the same London twice. It is, as Swyngedouw would argue, part of the continual “transformation of space” that is always already included in the urban fabric. Affect, in this sense, is significant to Sinclair’s uncovering of sociospatial histories of London because of the duality/dialectic his work insists upon in the affective counterpoise upon which his observations rest. His feelings of desire, surprise, regret, suspicion and admiration are all deeply tied to his mapping of the spaces of London.

The implication in Sinclair’s work is that his documentation of local individual histories and their spatial traces is a form of dissent from the official Heritage Industry’s version of English urban spaces because it seeks to map, and also un-map, local identities and their spatiohistorical significances, whether they are profitable or otherwise. However, it could also be argued that his work, too, rests on a kind of nostalgia that is less rigid, though nonetheless historically bounded, than the Tory heritage project. His attention to the creative forces within the city (the architects, the poets, the artists, the musicians, as well as working-class identities and other, less law-abiding, citizens) works in the “lines of heritage” that were arguably intentionally left out of the official Heritage record not only because they were not profitable but also because they were, at times, subversive forces and spaces within the city that threatened to undermine the Tory project at large (*Lights Out* 134).<sup>31</sup> Sinclair refers to the work of the poets as “the antimatter that granted validity to the Thatcherite free-market nightmare by steadfastly manufacturing its contrary: a flame in the

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<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, Sinclair also acknowledges that the Tory project of privatization and the rolling back of the welfare state gave artists and other fringe identities a purpose and fervour that had been less intense pre-Thatcher.

dark” (134). The poets and artists of the 1980s, then, enacted an artistic front, a creative resistance, to Thatcherite pressures. Significantly, these figures are always located in space: squats, run-down council flats, the markets and the streets. In this sense, their absence from the official heritage maps, despite the very real impact they have on culture and history, further spatializes the struggle between Thatcherite policies and the individual in the city.

In Sinclair’s text, then, the urban spaces of London are always deeply relational in a way that, as Lefebvre would agree, “has more to do with a path (sense and direction, orientation and horizon) than a model” (*Urban* 174). Keeping this in mind, Sinclair’s work engages with the fractal noise of the spatiohistorical paths in the city, what he calls “ley lines,” in a way that takes the transformation and production of space as its subject, rather than the “model” of a frozen, and marketable, moment in English history. Sinclair thus works within Lefebvre’s notion of the urban as his spatiohistorical record is always already moving, and never static. As Lefebvre asserts, “the urban phenomenon is made manifest as movement and therefore cannot achieve closure.” Along these lines, Lefebvre also argues “there is nothing harmonious about the urban as form and reality, for it also incorporates conflict, including class conflict” (*Urban* 175). *Lights Out for the Territory* encounters the forgotten and ruptured identities as they are located in the spaces of London, and enacts a kind of nostalgia for the identities and histories in existence prior to the Thatcherite intervention, as well as a future nostalgia for the identities and histories that could have been made in the future. As Sinclair notes, “it’s easy to forget: somewhere in the middle of all of this is a corpse” (*Lights Out* 80).

## CHAPTER TWO

### “House Arrest”: Irvine Welsh’s *Trainspotting*, Thatcherite Council Estates, and the New Under-Class

*[T]he socialists go on about your comrades, your class, your union, your society. Fuck all that shite. The Tories go on about your employer, your country, your family. Fuck that even mair. It’s me, me, fucking ME...*

(Welsh 30)

*Uneven development is the concrete manifestation of the production of space under capitalism. (Smith, *Uneven* 122-123)*

Keeping in mind Iain Sinclair’s representation of the spatiohistorical significance of Thatcherite urban spaces, in this chapter I turn to Irvine Welsh’s 1993 novel, *Trainspotting*, as a case study of the epoch-making shift in council housing and domestic welfare during the Thatcher period in Scotland. Welsh’s novel offers a resistant narrative that “combin[es] punk’s rebelliousness and rave’s hedonism [in a way that] rejects the temporal distance and (presumed) cultural proximity of heritage fiction and film that were so popular in the 1980s and 1990s” (Morace 44). Specifically, I focus on the ways in which Welsh forges significant connections between abject identity formation and the spaces of tower block and council estate housing through textual representations of violence, crime, and drug abuse. Along these lines, I examine Welsh’s portrayal in his novel of the kinds of communities and identities that formed and reformed in the tower blocks and council estates of the late 1970s

and 1980s as a consequence of Thatcherite neoliberal social policies.<sup>32</sup> By focusing on representations of Welsh's Muirhouse, a tower block on the outskirts of Edinburgh, I emphasize the kinds of "othering" that take place as a result of the residents' desire to distance themselves from "the striking visual symbol for the alienation and anomie of characters and communities" of unemployed working-class identities that try to survive within the estate boundaries (Burke 176).<sup>33</sup>

Irvine Welsh was born in Leith, Edinburgh in 1958 to working-class parents. As an infant, he moved to the newly constructed Muirhouse housing estate before relocating to London as a young adult in order to pursue his dual interests in real estate and punk rock music.<sup>34</sup> While Welsh lived in London pursuing his creative and professional interests

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<sup>32</sup> There are various examples of films, television shows, and novels that interrogate the spaces of tower block and council estates, as representations of disenfranchised working-class identities have taken on intensely sociopolitical significance throughout and beyond the Thatcher era. J.G. Ballard's *High Rise* (1975), while it focuses on middle-class identities, is one of the first British novels to engage directly with the dystopic dialectics of space and identity in a London tower block setting, while James Kelman's Booker Prize winning *How Late it Was, How Late* (1994) foregrounds the formation of disenfranchised working-class identities living amidst the threatening and often violent spaces of a Glasgow tower block estate. Numerous other novels have also addressed this subject, including *Our Fathers* (O'Hagan 1999), and *This Road is Red* (Irvine 2011). Filmic representations of British tower block estates include, but are by no means limited to, the BBC4 mini-series *Looking After JoJo* (1998), *Nil By Mouth* (Oldman 1997), and *Grief* (Leigh 2011). Not all representations engage in dramatic imaginings: the wildly hilarious London-set *15 Storeys High* (2002) and the Glasgow-set *Still Game* (2002) re-imagine the identities and spaces of the tower block as comedic and darkly quirky. However, the BBC television documentary *Tower Block of Commons* (2008), similar to the Scottish-set reality series *The Scheme* (2010), reassert the violence and isolated abject hopelessness of the Welshian identities I have discussed in this chapter. While *The Scheme* creates a Bakhtinian spectacle of the often-violent and alcohol-fueled social struggles that occur on a council estate in Kilmarnock in Scotland, *Tower Block of Commons* forges some direct connections between the responsibility of government and the welfare of the individuals within the estates. However, the result does arguably little more than to draw the kind of ever-stark class contrast already so deeply entrenched in British society.

<sup>33</sup> Danny Boyle's filmic interpretation of *Trainspotting* provides a quite different representation of the kinds of abject identities we find in the spaces of Welsh's novel. Notably, Boyle's version leaves out the majority of Renton's Marxist observations on space and class, as well as his more intellectual ideas about the self in relation to Thatcherite neoliberalism. Further, and perhaps more significantly, the film randomizes the spaces and places of the novel by avoiding naming specific estates or areas in Edinburgh that the characters inhabit. The film, then, while briefly touching on the "Scottish problem" of being "colonized by wankers," fails to meaningfully engage with the kinds of imprisonment that Renton experiences throughout the novel.

<sup>34</sup> Muirhouse was one of numerous housing schemes in Britain that were part of the Modernist Brutalist movement in working-class housing. They were similarly constructed as pre-fab concrete towers, low-rises and maisonettes.

during the 1980s, Edinburgh's Muirhouse had undergone the ubiquitous shift from a hopeful space of working-class pride to a dilapidated and poverty-stricken place of despair. Growing up on the Muirhouse council estate, Irvine Welsh was keenly aware of the dereliction and abject isolation that so many living on the Scottish estates had to endure as the Thatcher years wore on. As he remarked in 1995:

A place like Muirhouse - like fifteen years ago you'd go to Muirhouse and it'd be pretty much the same, sort of pretty drab housing schemes, not a lot there, but most people would have a bit of work and there'd be a chance of moving into something different and moving on or whatever. But that's just been completely cut off and it's become much more a kind of ghetto. (qtd in Kelly 1)

The shift from hope to hopelessness, as Welsh recounts, is rooted in the feeling of being "trapped in space" (Harvey, "Flexible Accumulation" 265), with no "chance of moving into something different," in a way that [leaves] individuals "completely cut off" from society (Kelly 1).

This feeling of being "cut off" from society was echoed in the often antagonistic relationship between Scotland and England. By the time Welsh turned his literary attention to Muirhouse in the early 1990s, the estate had become one of the most notorious in Scotland, and indeed in Britain, for rampant crime and intravenous drug abuse. The combination of cheap heroin coming into Scotland in the 1980s coupled with massive unemployment on the council estates had created, as Black, Hanley, and Kelly declare, a desperate and abject social environment:

Due to an influx of cheap heroin into Scotland in the 1980's, housing schemes such as Muirhouse, which had already stagnated into ghettos through the de-industrialization and mass-unemployment that characterized the late 1970s and 1980s, were now also blighted by further problems such as drug addiction, crime and the spread of HIV/AIDS. (Kelly 3)

Welsh sets *Trainspotting* in this sociohistorical epoch of unemployment, rampant drug abuse, and the spread of HIV/AIDS in 1980s Edinburgh through representations of the dialectic relationship between abject identity formation and the spaces of council estates. For Welsh, the Scottish problem of abject drug abuse and disease is elided, as becomes evident in Renton's "it's shite being Scottish" rant, with the deeply felt animosity at the ongoing colonization of the Scottish by the English. While the desperation of abject identity formation ran rampant in tower block and council estates such as Muirhouse, London and the Tories benefited greatly from the seemingly unending profits coming out of Aberdeen's oil industry. In this sense, the "ghetto[ization]" and isolation of unemployed working-class populations living in housing estates such as Muirhouse echo Harvey's suggestion that low-income populations become "trapped in space."

It is through the nexus of "time, space, and relationality" that Welsh fleshes out the fractured identities of working-class individuals during the Thatcher period as they struggle with a significant shift in their sociopolitical subjectivity that has left them floundering to find new ways to form identity and community. In my reading of Welsh's novel, I argue that the kinds of ruptures and fractures that the Tory-described "new under class" experienced during the Thatcher period, and beyond, are deeply connected to the spaces in which they lived and the ways in which those spaces were framed sociopolitically. As

Burke suggests, “condensed into images of the tower block and the windswept estate is a whole history of modernization, its perceived failures, and of those left behind or excluded from its promises and benefits” (181). With this in mind, I am specifically interested in the way that Welsh’s text disrupts essentializing notions of identity categories such as class through an at times temporally disjointed narrative structure, as well as through representations of different identities that all share similar living conditions yet experience them in significantly diverse ways. Thus, the seemingly homogenous category of “under class” is troubled in Welsh’s text as he explores variant identities formed in and through the spaces of council estates that in turn echo the fractured nature of the abject subject. I pursue the following line of inquiry: how does Welsh represent the nexus of council housing, community, and drug abuse as deeply connected to issues of class and identity? Further, how does Welsh imagine these kinds of inequalities as reified through the spatial evidence of the dismantling of the welfare state in a way that further entrenches the growing disenfranchisement of unemployed working-class identities living on council estates?

### **Housing, Identity, and the Rolling Back of the Welfare State**

Historically, council estates and tower blocks in the United Kingdom have been associated with the working classes. Council estates were constructed in the post-war period to replace the dilapidated Victorian row houses often un-nostalgically referred to as “slums” and emblematic of a Dickensian underbelly of social decay deeply tied to traditionally “other” spaces such as the East End of London or on the peripheries of major British cities such as Sheffield, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. Tim Tinker, the architect who designed the Heygate estate in Elephant and Castle in South London, suggests that the desire was to create a kind of socially determined oasis amidst an ever-increasing urban

pollution, explaining that the council estates and tower blocks he “designed were light and airy, and the now despised walkways were created to keep people away from cars, which back in the late 60s when the estate was planned were just on the point of becoming ubiquitous” (Moss).

Initially, as Stephen Moss reports in his discussion with Tinker, “council housing was seen as a natural mode of living, a much broader spectrum of people lived in it than was later the case, and the community [Tinker] says he deliberately set out to create worked”; however, “only later, when people were only housed if they scored highly on an index of deprivation or social challenge and the council lacked the resources to deal with the attendant problems, did the ‘blight’ begin.” In keeping with the sentiment of other architects responsible for these modernist structures, Tinker blames the failed social utopia on the politics that were projected onto residents of the estates, rather than on the spaces of the estates themselves. The failed utopia, however, was not simply a result of the “index of deprivation or social challenge” of the residents (an argument that would rid the architects and designers of any measure of responsibility in the perceived failure), but rather a combination of socially determined and cheaply designed structures (i.e. pre-fabricated concrete slabs and poorly designed heating and lighting infrastructures) alongside a deepening sense of disenfranchisement and disillusionment that prevailed during the intense unemployment of the late 1970s and 1980s.

The argument that Tinker and others propose essentially places the blame on the residents and the politics, a feeling that was increasingly felt as Thatcherite desires to demolish the welfare state took direct aim at council estates. As Burke notes, the

spaces [of tower block estates] are routinely associated in the popular imagination as the sites of, and symbols for, the major social problems of contemporary Britain (crime, poverty, anti-social behaviour), but such identification, by politicians and media especially, frequently serves as a cover for anti-working-class and anti-immigrant sentiment. (176)

As a result, council estates, and specifically tower blocks, became spatially determined as not only working-class but also welfare dependent, and thus a burden on a country saddled with increasing taxes and exploding unemployment. From the partial collapse of Ronan Point in early 1968 to the extreme violence and social decay that continues in many council estates today, the imagined utopian narrative built into the council estate of the 1950s and 1960s became impossible to sustain.<sup>35</sup> The belief that the abject social ills of drug abuse, violence, and crime that plagued the Victorian working-class row houses, or “slums,” would be resolved in and through the spaces of modern Brutalist estates was deflated as it became clear that the architecture served instead to intensify issues of isolation and alienation, as well as lack of solidarity and community.<sup>36</sup> In this sense, the dialectic

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<sup>35</sup> In May 1968, a resident on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor of the Ronan Point tower block in London lit a match as she prepared her morning tea. The match ignited a gas leak that knocked her unconscious, blew out the walls of her apartment, killed four people and injured seventeen others. The explosion partially collapsed the southeast side of the tower, and fully collapsed the confidence people had in the construction of the tower blocks more generally. An investigation into the collapse determined that the tower was not structurally sound, and lacking a structural frame that would support the floors in the event of such an explosion. The study also determined that since the explosion was not particularly strong, a strong wind or fire could have had the same effect. Continued concern over the structural viability of the tower led to its demolition in 1986. See [http://matdl.org/failurecases/Building\\_Collapse\\_Cases/Ronan\\_Point](http://matdl.org/failurecases/Building_Collapse_Cases/Ronan_Point) for a more complete history and analysis of the Larsen-Nielson system that Ronan Point was fashioned after.

<sup>36</sup> Brutalist architecture came into vogue during the 1950s and 1960s and is associated with the architects Peter and Allison Smithson (famously known for their design of the controversial Robin Hood Estate in Poplar, London). Though this architectural approach was often criticized for its dark, foreboding and impersonal concrete construction, National Heritage began listing Brutalist structures such as the Barbican and Trellick Towers in the early 2000s since they have come to represent a significant moment in British architectural history, as well as, some argue, evidence of the fading hope of the working classes during the 1970s and 1980s.

relationship between space and social struggle contributed to a re-spatialization of a sociopolitical tumult born of ideological conflict. In other words, the tower block “dramatis[e]d the connections between local conditions of existence on the peripheries of contemporary British culture and the national, even global, political decisions and conditions that g[ave] rise to them” (Burke 176). As a result, the residents of tower block council estates were deeply defined by highly politicized and prejudiced constructions and definitions of space.

Patrick Keiller marks the connection between identity and domestic space in his documentary *The Dilapidated Dwelling* (2000). Narrated by Tilda Swinton, Keiller’s film examines the United Kingdom as a technologically advanced society resistant to modern forms of housing. Keiller reports that most of the houses occupied by the working and middle classes during the 1970s through to the early 1990s were often more than 100 years old - many considerably older. Further, Keiller argues, the underlying reluctance to live in newly built housing reflected a market-driven sociocultural distrust of new forms of prefabricated structures that were fashionable in the post-war period - new forms that were employed in the development of council estates and tower blocks. Many tower blocks and council estates were designed as pre-fabricated cement structures that dominated the physical landscape with their height and the social landscape with their hundreds, sometimes thousands, of inhabitants. Such structures stood almost always in direct contrast to the semi-detached row housing that marked the pre-war period, and as such distinctly marked those who lived in them as different.

While many British tower blocks and council estates were built in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, by the late 1970s the combination of cheap construction and

intensifying social decay resulted in large numbers of demolitions, a process that would continue over the following two decades: “across the country, there were many demolitions, not only of high-rise estates, but also of low-rise, deck-access blocks, such as the Chalkhill area in Brent, London, demolished in the 1990s” (Black 22). The razing of these buildings brought out eerily cheering crowds happy to witness the destruction of what had come to be seen by many as symbols of decline and violent class separation, while others wondered where those who relied on the estates for housing would now live (Hanley; Wright, *Journey*). At the same time, while many buildings were demolished, private investors acquired various *well-located* tower block estates in order to convert them into private condominiums.<sup>37</sup> As a result, the stock of subsidized housing was depleted to such low levels that those who were marginalized and in need of housing became increasingly desperate for places to live and thus often forced into dilapidated living conditions. Such dilapidated living conditions are represented in Welsh’s novel as dialectically engaged with, for example, abject drug abuse and disease.

As Glendinning and Muthesius report, many architects responsible for the council estates felt that their designs became unfairly targeted in the late 1970s and 1980s as integral to, and indeed responsible for, the sociospatial decline of working-class identities that moved into them:

We were charged with destroying ‘traditional communities’ by clearing the slums – yet the delinquency and disregard for rules and regulations which underlies so much of the present day squalor of Modern estates surely cannot be separated from ‘slum culture’ and, thus, from that same sense of ‘community’! (326)

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<sup>37</sup> These estates include the Barbican and Trellick Tower, as well as the newly reconditioned Park Hill Estate in Sheffield.

Beyond the reproach that some architects felt towards the inhabitants of Modern estates, some contemporary cultural critics have recently turned their attention to the spatial aspect of the estates and buildings in relation to the communities formed within them. Much of the criticism regarding the architecture focuses on the isolating nature of the cement walkways (often referred to as “streets in the sky”), pedestrian overpasses meant to control “the circulation of people between zones by way of artificial arteries,” and enclosed green spaces that limited the kinds of movements and interactions in which the residents could engage (Harvey, “Postmodernism in the City” 67).

The intended utopia of mass urban housing constructed out of prefabricated concrete blocks and slabs soon turned distinctly dystopic as, for example, the failure of non-violent community-building inside the estates led to crime, violence, and dereliction. While Tinker and others argue that it was the council’s decision to house increasingly abject individuals in tower block flats that created the dereliction of the estates, Hanley and Wright argue that the combination of dark concrete walkways and isolated stairways *alongside* an often disenfranchised population of residents created conditions ripe for new forms of community that were often not in keeping with the kinds of community building originally intended by the architects and designers of the tower block estates. As such, “council housing [became] the perfect symbol for the failings of the public sector: unpopular, socially stigmatizing, incompetently managed and oblivious to consumer preferences” (Cole & Furbey 188). While the housing projects were initially a symbol of postwar employment and social responsibility, by the late 1960s they had taken on a rather unsavory stigma as the decay of the buildings echoed the decay of the communities within their walls, as well as the dream of social programs and subsidies on which those

communities depended. As Wright further suggests, “stripped of its progressive aura, the council tower block ... [underwent] a symbolic conversion and emerged as a monstrous emblem of the futility of all State-led social reform” (*Journey* 90). The utopic “streets in the sky” no longer represented the promise of socialism and the working classes, but rather grew to embody everything that the Thatcherite government came to revile as indicative of the failures of the welfare state.

Burke argues that “not only does the tower block come to mean the opposite of what it once did, but it is also pressed into service politically in such a way that makes it stand in for a whole set of ideological commitments” that were decidedly anti-socialist. Thus, in order to diffuse the social welfare system, “Thatcher established a chain of affiliation between history, spatiality and ideology” that not only stigmatized council estates as the obelisks of the welfare state, but also by default stigmatized the inhabitants of those very spaces (Burke 178). Since many working-class citizens in Britain during the late 1970s and 1980s lived in housing schemes, often located on the periphery of major British cities, such as Muirhouse in *Trainspotting*, their identities became increasingly defined in and through the spaces in which they lived, rather than by other determining factors such as profession or familial tradition. The result was a rupture of historical identity formation that saw the working classes as increasingly unemployed, and increasingly left behind in rundown housing estates that bore little resemblance to the kinds of sociocultural transitions going on in the cities to which they were attached. As Burke further suggests:

Tower blocks constitute a striking visual symbol for the alienation and anomie of characters and communities, but they are also the material, even concrete, terrain that registers a history of uneven development and the persistence of social and economic

inequities. Originally identified with the modernist and modernising enthusiasms of the welfare state, tower blocks now house those who have been left behind or are out of sync with the dominant fantasies of a fully modernised British state. (178)

While the council estates became popularly understood as spatial representations of the troubled past of welfare within British urban spaces, there was, as Burke explains, a re-imagining of the working-class council tenant as unable, or unwilling, to keep up with the march out of socialism. The council estates became sites of political battle, and, as Wright suggests, “a lousy machine for living in, but an excellent one for discrediting political opponents” (*Journey* 93). The inhabitants of council estates became, then, clearly defined as markers of uneven development.

David Harvey argues that “low income populations, usually lacking the means to overcome and hence command space, find themselves for the most part trapped in space” (“Flexible” 265). In this sense, space, and the ability to move in and through both public and private spaces, is understood as an important indicator of class. As a result, many of those living on council estates became “trapped” because they “lack[ed] the means” to participate in the Thatcherite move toward private owner occupation or private market rentals. The inability to escape space, Harvey continues, turns into a desire to “dominate space ... through continuous appropriation ... [through] frequent material and interpersonal transactions and the formation of very small scale communities” (265-266). Many individuals living on council estates forged a new sense of identity, including local status and agency, through “transactions” involving drugs and theft, and the defense of appropriated space through gang-like behaviour in a way that also served to form “very small scale communities.” These transactions, as Welsh reveals in *Trainspotting*, were a

matter of daily existence in and around the estates. For those who did not participate willingly in the struggle over drugs, crime, and space, the tower blocks and council estates became difficult, often isolating and dangerous, places to live.<sup>38</sup>

Lynsey Hanley's *Estates: An Intimate History* illustrates her personal experiences growing up during the late 1970s and early 1980s on the Wood Estate in Birmingham, one of the largest council estates in England, through intimate portraits of the many identities she encountered before moving away as a young adult. Throughout her text she refers to council estates as isolating, fear-filled, and abject: "they sap the spirit, suck out the hope and ambition, and draw in apathy and nihilism" (4). Hanley thus marks the spaces of council estates and tower blocks as "hell on earth" (5). While these feelings are based on Hanley's own experiences, she also acknowledges the popular perception of the council estates as "a dream gone sour" that had eventually become "holding cages for the poor and disenfranchised" (11). Feelings of fear and anxiety, then, were echoed on both sides of the estate walls. Hanley echoes Wright's observation that "the tower block is a machine for inducing paranoia ... its supposedly communal spaces are filled with anxiety, suspicion, and fear" (*Journey 2*), and she further argues that such feelings are the result of the increasing divide between the wealthy and the poor: "council estates are nothing to be scared of, unless you are frightened of inequality. They are a physical reminder that we live in a society that divides people up according to how much money they have to spend on shelter" (Hanley 5). The inequality, in this sense, is not just social but also markedly spatial.

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<sup>38</sup> However, as Glendinning and Muthesius have suggested, many council estates benefited from tenants' organizations that took on the grass roots responsibilities of community building that the council was simply unable to provide. In these estates, they suggest, incidents of crime and theft were not as pronounced (322-323).

Wright employs the case study of a widowed pensioner living in Rowan Court in Hackney as an example of someone who moved in when the estate was first occupied in 1971 and, after living there for twenty years, felt a prisoner in her own home as vandalism and squatters ran the place into dereliction and the council all but stopped making basic repairs. Wright recounts the “degradation of the block” during his tour of the upper floors of Rowan Court: “the evidence is everywhere: the graffiti, the filth around the rubbish chutes, the stairways littered with debris of adolescent drug abuse, the open access to the roof where the pirate radio stations bring their transmitters” (*Journey* 73).<sup>39</sup> While the detritus of discarded “filth” and “adolescent drug abuse” litters the estate, Wright’s attention to “the graffiti” and “pirate radio stations” echoes Harvey’s suggestion that those trapped within a particular space will seek to dominate that very space. By writing on the walls, or using the tops of tower blocks as platforms to illegally broadcast their voices, the walls and rooftops, and thus the spaces, of the tower blocks became the foundations upon which many youths growing up on the estates began to build, and re-build, their identities. In *Trainspotting*, Welsh represents the spatialization of Tommy’s HIV positive status as being marked on the wall outside of his flat in a way that writes his identity, and his inequality, on to the spaces of the estate.

The feelings of inequality that both Hanley and Wright address were in many ways exacerbated by the Conservative “Right to Buy scheme that allowed tenants who could afford to buy to become homeowners and, as such, focus on home ownership, which was seen as crucial to social mobility” (Black 23). While the Right to Buy scheme had been on the Conservative agenda prior to Thatcher’s leadership, it was not until her second term as

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<sup>39</sup> Pirate radio stations have become ubiquitous in many tower block estates across Britain, along with turf wars, drug use, and gang-like behaviour that seems to be part of the culture (*Tower Block Dreams: From Grime to Prime Time*. BBC 3, Dir. David O’Neill, 2004).

Prime Minister that the incentives and “deals” became too good to resist for those who could afford to participate. The Right to Buy scheme thus exacerbated the intense class differences already felt on both sides of the estate walls: “both poverty and difference became visible: it became a matter of whether you had double-glazing or mass-produced council windows; whether your front door was made of strong oak or blue-painted council wood” (Hanley 136). Further, as Stuart Lowe suggests, “the right to buy, posed as the ultimate in tenants rights by the Conservative government, [...] fragmented the social base and the ideological unity of council tenants” (93). If there had been a hope of a broader community beyond the tumult of drugs and gangs, Lowe and Hanley argue, it was fractured entirely through the privatization of many council flats that further divided and separated people by class and privilege within the estate itself. More broadly, civic belonging and individual responsibility were promised through the private ownership of council flats, and ownership itself, as Home Secretary Douglas Hurd suggested in April of 1988, was presented as “a precondition of the existence of active citizenship” (Bianchini and Schwengel 223). Tory pundits imagined that participation in the Right to Buy scheme created opportunities for “active citizenship,” yet they did so in a way that further entrenched an “‘underclass’ not seen since Victorian times” (Evans 32).<sup>40</sup> Those who could participate were “active,” not trapped by space but rather liberated by the ownership of it. As Hanley argues, “the Right to Buy was the Trojan horse of privatization: it made the paring-back of the welfare state seem attractive and reasonable, a proposition which, in turn, made those who remained reliant on the state seem weak” (136). Bianchini and Schwengel suggest that

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<sup>40</sup> For a historical record of the term “underclass” see Lee.

Hurd's speech makes it clear that material prosperity is the very precondition of the existence of active citizenship: in Thatcherite rhetoric, active citizens, Hurd's 'successful people'[, ] are implicitly counterpoised to the 'passive citizens' who are recipient[s] of various forms of state benefits. A *New Statesman* editorial could therefore legitimately conclude that citizenship for the Conservatives 'is for the few... it has to be earned; it has to be privatised'. (223)

However, for those who purchased flats in estates such as Rowan Court, as Wright argues, the prognosis was actually worse than for those who were unable to buy, as new flat owners eventually realized they had "bought into their slice of the building that now turn[ed] out to be somebody else's machine for maintaining proper social distances" (*Journey* 93).

The Thatcherite assault on the tower block and the council estate effectively marked such spaces as the unworkable and monstrous obelisks of the welfare state that, in turn, also similarly marked the residents of those spaces as abjectly derelict. Not only did many working-class individuals become "other" through, for example, Thatcher's labeling of defiant union members as "the enemy within"; they were transformed at the same time into the kinds of non-citizens that a de-industrialized Thatcherite society no longer had a use for – reconfigured by the Tories as social refuse and detritus, the unfortunate living evidence of the dirty past of socialist Britain.<sup>41</sup> As a result, the English working classes themselves became even more abject than the feared immigrant identities that Powell warned about in his *Rivers of Blood* speech. The newly disenfranchised working-class individual became intensely abject not only because he/she became unwillingly unemployable and, as a result,

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<sup>41</sup> In comparing the striking miners with the Argentinian forces that participated in the Falklands War, Thatcher invoked the language of war on the British people themselves. See <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/105563> for the full text of her 1984 speech.

reliant on the state for subsistence, but also because his/her dependence on the state was unmistakably spatialized through the obelisks, or corpses, of an outdated socialism that the council estates had come to represent.<sup>42</sup> The intense dialectic relationship between space and identity formation that those living on the estates endured echoes Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject:

Instead of sounding himself as to his 'being,' he does so concerning his place:

*'Where am I?'* instead of *'Who am I?'* For the space that engrosses the dejected, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogeneous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic. (Kristeva 8)

Similar to Lefebvre's notion of the urban as "made manifest as movement" and unable to "achieve closure" (*Urban* 174), for Kristeva, the abject, and thus the "catastrophic," is always determined through differences that are never "*homogeneous*" or "*totalizable*" and reflected in and through space. In the case of council estates and those living on them, social divisions are distinctly tied to personal financial success and the kinds of spatial access such success allows. As Lefebvre further suggests, space "incorporates conflict, including class conflict" (*Urban* 174). In this sense, such "divisible, [and] foldable" identities living on council estates became the hallmarks of a divided social class that lacked the community and common social identity and solidarity of the 1970s unions in a way that became a condition of a kind of spatialized abjection always in flux. With this in mind, I turn now to an analysis of *Trainspotting* in order to explore the ways in which

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<sup>42</sup> While I acknowledge that the issue of nationalism is significant in this novel in terms of English and Scottish identities, an issue that Welsh foregrounds in the "It's Shite Being Scottish" rant, I would suggest that Britain as a whole experienced a tectonic shift in how working-class individuals were able to live and work in de-industrialized Britain. I will turn to the "Scottish problem" in the conclusion of this chapter.

Welsh's novel gives representation to the formation of abject identities in and through the derelict and dilapidated spaces of Thatcherite tower blocks and council estates.

### **Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*: The Spaces of Abject Identities**

The Thatcher period was especially difficult for unemployed working-class individuals living in tower block and council estates in Scotland. The rise of HIV/AIDS infection, intense drug abuse, massive unemployment, and a continued feeling of disenfranchisement and distance from Westminster form the context for Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*. As Grant Farred explains, in reference to the practice of the seemingly pointless recording of train sightings alluded to in the title, "in Welsh's novel 'trainspotting' is symptomatic of the socioeconomic decay of Edinburgh, symbolic of the Leith lads' unemployability and commensurate with the inordinate amount of 'leisure' time available to this post-Thatcher generation of Scots" (217). Since much of the new industry made up of technology and finance that mitigated unemployment in the South did not make its way north, Scottish industrial cities such as Edinburgh and Glasgow, and northern English cities such as Manchester and Sheffield, had a large proportion of what the Tories had come to call the "undeserving poor" - those whom they claimed refused to try to find work, collected more than one benefit cheque, or illegally claimed benefits to support their existing wages. In addition to the kind of abject identity formation that Linsey Hanley and others attest was so prevalent on the estates, the Scottish were also doubly "othered" in their struggle over devolution and subsequent issues of national identity and what it meant to be Scottish.<sup>43</sup> The ways in which Scots formed identity was made complex through their position within a nationless state coupled with what Morace calls "inadequate housing ...

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<sup>43</sup> For more on devolution, see Nairn.

such as Muirhouse which would ... become the breeding ground for many of the social problems that Welsh's fiction addresses" (14).

While the problems of social isolation, violence, crime, and drug abuse were felt in the council spaces throughout Britain, such issues were more deeply felt in Scotland. Arguably, the disenfranchisement of the unemployed working classes was exacerbated by the failure of the devolution referendum of 1979 to detach the political rule of Scotland from England and, perhaps more significantly, the social policies that would come into effect as a result of Thatcherism. Scotland was, as result, "unable to secure independence," thus "rendering [Scotland] a peculiar institution [:] the stateless nation, an internal colony within the British state which clings precariously to its 'difference' from England" (Farred 216). The assertion of Scottish national identity became, then, a rejection of English and/or British identity. As Farred further suggests, "Scottish identity has become the vehicle for a complex, ambivalently articulated sense of national self" (216). I would suggest that such feelings of disenfranchisement felt by those wishing to leave the British state are in many ways similar to the kinds of resentments of individuals living on increasingly derelict council estates. Such spaces became territories within which individuals were able to root their sense of identity and create a sense of community that "congregates through a vicious victimization of others and is forged through violence" (Kelly 60). Further, such spaces were easy to control and dominate in ways that the nation simply was not. Nowhere was this more keenly felt than in the council estates of cities such as Scotland's capital of Edinburgh - a city that would take on the ominous moniker of the UK's leading HIV/AIDS capital.

As Kelly argues, “[*Trainspotting*] is not merely about heroin as such but instead utilizes the drug’s social environment to meditate upon the paradigm shifts that ruptured traditional working-class identity and community in the late 1970s and 1980s” (38). While many such as Kelly, Horton, and Farred focus on the issue of national identity and the processes of disenfranchisement that Welsh explores in detail, I turn my attention to the ways in which the spaces of the tower block are enmeshed in such processes of disenfranchisement. Keeping in mind what Morace calls the “remapping of Britain,” where London is portrayed as a place of Thatcherite opportunity while Edinburgh is the place of disease and poverty, this chapter focuses on *Trainspotting* as a case study for the kinds of abject identity formations that occur within the spaces of the tower block estate (Morace 21).<sup>44</sup> Despite Horton’s suggestion that the “housing estates form the backdrop to *Trainspotting*,” I argue that in order to fully understand Welsh’s characters, we must look to the deeply dialectic relationship forged between space and identity within the tower block flats.

Despite Morace’s claim that “urban space [is not] the abstract postmodern space produced by capitalism, as described by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*,” I argue that the spaces of the tower block are in fact deeply affected by, and produced from, uneven development as Harvey and Smith understand it (Morace 40). Indeed, Morace goes on to contradict his anti-Lefebvrian claim when he says that the urban space in *Trainspotting* “is . . . divided in various ways: by economics, by drugs (or drug dealers), by

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<sup>44</sup> While I acknowledge the significance of pursuing the idea of Scottish identity in Welsh’s work, for the purposes of this study I focus specifically on the spaces of the tower block as a British phenomenon. This is not to discount the Scottish question, but rather to use the broader issue of Scottish identity formation and notions of inclusion/exclusion as a backdrop to the problematic spaces of the tower block across Britain.

familiarity,” thus emphasizing precisely the type of elements which Lefebvre argues produce space. As Ian Cole and Robert Furbey argue:

[S]tate housing [is] a lived experience for millions of people and not just a historical artifact. Housing is an object for use, a source of status and identity, the locus of domestic labour and a framework in which class, gender or ethnic divisions may be changed or reinforced. (5)

For Welsh’s characters, the desire to establish a sense of “status and identity,” something characters such as Renton are unable to do as a result of “being colonized by wankers,” is represented, and acted upon, through “lived experiences” of abject drug abuse, violence, and crime set in and around the spaces of the council estate. By “incorporat[ing] into the core conception of identity the ... dimensions of *time*, *space* and *relationality*,” Welsh represents Renton and his friends as sociohistorically uprooted and spatially trapped (Somers 606).

### **“Winter in West Granton”; or Another Winter of Discontent**

In the section of the novel titled “Winter in West Granton,” Welsh throws into relief the dialectic relationship between abject identity formation and the spaces of Edinburgh’s West Granton Estate (widely accepted as the most socioeconomically troubled in all of Britain before it was demolished in the mid-1990s). Welsh sets Tommy’s decline at West Granton in the late 1980s, the period that saw the estate at its most derelict, mostly boarded up and inhabited by what was popularly imagined as Thatcher’s “new under class” comprised of abjectly unemployed and drug addicted post-working-class identities (Lee). Keeping this setting in mind, I argue that Welsh engages Stallybrass and White’s “abject

male body in crisis” when, for example, he imagines Tommy’s social and physical decline as dialectically engaged with his council flat at West Granton (80).<sup>45</sup> The reference to “winter” in the title, with all of the obvious allusions to death and darkness, also draws special attention to the sense of isolation and desolation that Renton finds Tommy trapped within, in terms of both his heroin addiction and HIV positive status, as well as to the derelict space of his council flat where he is subsequently abandoned by friends, family, and society. Tommy “falls into an inhuman slowness, a slowness that distances [him] from both the outside world and any space of interior subjectivity” so that he can avoid having to confront not only the devastation of losing his girlfriend but also, more broadly, the declining opportunities he has to succeed within society (Karnicky 142).

Renton’s visit to Tommy’s flat in West Granton is spurred by news that Tommy has tested HIV positive - a status likely gleaned from his months-old heroin addiction that Renton was “guilty enough” in supporting (Welsh 317). Significantly, from Renton’s perspective, it is at times difficult to identify the boundaries between Tommy and, for example, the “battered arm chair” he sits in or “the air [that] smells ay damp, and rubbish that should have been pit oot ages ago” (314). Renton, on the other hand, appears in distinct relief from both Tommy and the flat since he has tested negative for HIV, kicked heroin, and moved to Thatcher’s London to work in real estate. While Renton manages (at least temporarily) to escape into the Thatcherite world of consumerism and real estate speculation in London, Tommy is left to literally “rot” in a forgotten council estate. As

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<sup>45</sup> Notably, the film version of *Trainspotting* attempts to reflect the council flats where Renton and his friends buy and/or use heroin as dilapidated, with peeling paint on the walls and mattresses on the floor. For example, despite leaving out the significant detail of Tommy relocating to West Granton once he becomes an HIV positive heroin addict, the film does provide a stark contrast between Tommy’s flat before and after he uses heroin in a way that gestures to the relationship between space and identity. Notably, the walls, in the short time he has been using, take on the aura of dereliction that others such as Mikey Forester and Mother Superior’s flats have had throughout the film.

Renton records Tommy “sitting in a battered armchair,” he notes his own discomfort in that same space as he “sit[s] down, in an identical chair. It feels hard, and has springs coming through” (315). Renton observes that “many years ago, this wis some rich cunt’s chair. It’s hud at least a couple ay decades in poor homes though. Now it’s winded up wi Tommy” (315). Tommy, in this sense, is represented as an endpoint for consumer objects that even “poor homes” do not wish to keep, inasmuch as he is also elided with the actual socio-materiality of the chair - discarded, used up, and left to rot. Welsh thus imagines Tommy as a kind of depository of social detritus; an unemployed, drug addicted, and HIV positive young man, he represents the opposite of what Burke suggests are “the dominant fantasies of a fully modernized Britain” (178). Tommy, then, becomes the new “other,” one of Thatcher’s “underclass,” while Renton escapes the entrapment of the council flat through the trading and selling of others’ spaces and spatialities.

Echoing Harvey’s punitive trope of entrapment, Renton refers to the West Granton estate as a “prison” (315), “holding cages for the poor and disenfranchised” (Hanley 11), where Tommy and similar subject identities have become isolated and desperately doomed. As a result, out-of-control crime, violence, and abject drug abuse become a kind of counterpoise to the control and repression that the sociopolitical isolation of spaces such as West Granton represent. Such activities, as Harvey argues, become ways to “dominate space ... and [form...] very small communities” (“Flexible” 265-6). Indeed, the idea of “prison” is repeated soon after in this scene when Renton suggests “kicking and using again is like gaun to prison” (Welsh 317). Similar to the processes of imprisonment and heroin addiction that Renton associates with living on a council estate, he further imagines death as “a process, rather than an event,” where identities like Tommy “rot away slowly in

homes and hospitals, or places like this” (315). Death, a significant aspect of Kristeva’s idea of the abject, is thus imagined as a process that occurs in and through space. Renton likens flats such as Tommy’s in West Granton to “homes and hospitals” in a way that suggests the function of the council estate has shifted from working-class domesticity and opportunity to a “holding cage” for the dead and dying - the reluctant zombies of Thatcher’s new Britain. “Marked with the sign of death,” Tommy “inhabit[s] the territory of disease and infection” (Horton 221). Tommy’s status as drug addicted and HIV positive renders him death-like and ultimately vulnerable to abuse and control by others attempting to “dominate space ... through continuous appropriation” (Harvey “Flexible Accumulation” 265-6). As such, the graffiti “PLAGUER,” the “mark [of] the sign of death,” sprayed on the reinforced front door of his flat not only identifies him as HIV positive, but also implicates him in the process of the disease throughout the estate. Renton refers to Tommy’s flat as “one ay those varicose-vein flats, so called because of the plastered cracks all over its facing” (315) in a way that concretizes the dialectic engagement of the “abject male body in crisis” as the spaces of West Granton are inscribed with a kind of corporeal decrepitude, the “varicose veins,” explained through the language of the body: “as such, the tower block can be understood as a monstrous body, an abject concrete materialization of all that which is at one representative of the nation and incompatible with national fantasies of integrity and modernity” (Burke 182). As the evidence of Tommy’s abject identity becomes increasingly spatialized, and his drug addiction and HIV infection wear him down, he becomes less able to “dominate space” and, in turn, maintain a continuous identity in relation to the spaces of the estate. The process of identity formation in this sense is, arguably, the “process” of his death, inscribed on, and by, the space in which he lives and “rot[s] away” (315).

More broadly, as Horton asserts, “the characters in *Trainspotting* are a disease of the body politic and of the civic body that is Edinburgh. They are, to use Margaret Thatcher’s words, “the enemy within” (221). Tommy’s “male body in crisis,” embodied here within the decrepitude of a flat that “fifteen thousand people on the waiting list” did not want, signals the breakdown of a caring community and society into one that rejects illness and suffering - a breakdown that echoes Thatcher’s famous declaration, during an interview in *Women’s Own* with Douglas Keay, that “there is no such thing as society” (Thatcher, *Women’s Own* 1987). Rather than looking to his community for assistance and support, eventually Tommy, as Renton recognizes, will begin to fear those around him:

Tommy’s a tidy bastard, he believes in what Begbie caws the discipline ay the baseball bat. He’s also goat hard mates, like Beggars, and no-sae-hard mates, like me. In spite ay this, Tommy will become mair vulnerable taw persecution. His friends will decline in their numbers as his needs increase. The inverse, or perverse, mathematics ay life. (Welsh 315-16)

Tommy’s abjection is thus not only defined by his position within Thatcher’s “new under class,” but also by his new otherness relative to his friends and neighbours, as well as his family (“he’d blown it wi his ma” [315]). As Tommy’s ability to manipulate his environment through violence and fear diminishes, so too does his sense of community and power. As Renton notes, “his friends will decline in their numbers as his needs increase” (315-16).

Welsh gestures here to the internal stratification of class within the estates, where the weaker and more vulnerable occupy a lower status on the social ladder than those who can to some extent successfully negotiate their surrounding space, reflecting Manuel

Castells' argument that "spatial forms are most often engaged in and through formations of class identity" (Castells, *City, Class, and Power* 16). As I have argued above, the Right to Buy scheme further fractured already stressed working-class communities by stratifying the socioeconomic opportunities afforded to individuals within the council estates. Renton is acutely aware of such divisions when he accuses the Thatcher government of selling "off all the good hooses, leaving the dross to the likes ay Tommy" (Welsh 315). There is a clear connection here between Tommy's economic status, his occupation of the estate flat, and his access to such categories as 'morality' or 'human rights': "what's morality got to dae wi politics, but? It's aw about poppy" (315). As Renton sits across from Tommy, he considers how the latter cannot afford to "heat this gaff," let alone "put hissel in a bubble, live in the warm, eat good fresh food, keep his mind stimulated wi new challenges," in the way that such fellow AIDS sufferers as their friend "Davie Mitchell" or the filmmaker Derek Jarman are able to, since unlike them, he is unemployed and drug addicted (317). Tommy becomes, then, a spatialized "representation of the life of lower-class Scotland in the age of late capitalism" (Karnicky 138). Tommy's inability to help himself, and the desire of those around him to further stigmatize him because of his vulnerability, draws into stark relief the increasing pressures of Thatcher's new neoliberal economic policies.

Throughout the novel, Renton attempts to frame and reframe his perception and logical understanding of the communities and spaces within which he and his friends find themselves trapped by trying on different applications of Marxist, Kierkegaardian, and existential philosophies without ever genuinely committing to any position. Such multiple, varied, and ultimately disengaged approaches to understanding gesture to a kind of abject partial perspective where meaning and identity are always already changing, where

“meaning collapses” (Kristeva). The result is Kelly’s “profound crisis in class identities,” where subjects such as Renton and Tommy struggle and often fail to adapt to neoliberal individualism and Thatcherite free market economics without escaping into those very ideologies that fractured their sociohistorical identities to begin with. It is only when Renton escapes to London that he can participate in the Thatcherite project of individualism and wealth accumulation, thus creating the perception that opportunity only exists in the South.

### **“It Goes Without Saying”: Neoliberalism, Historical Identities, and the Spaces of Addiction**

Throughout the novel, many of Renton’s acquaintances succumb to early deaths from heroin overdoses and HIV/AIDS complications. Such abject deaths, as many have argued, were deeply related to the sudden shifts in Thatcherite social policy that rendered many working-class individuals isolated, stigmatized, and unemployed.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, the novel addresses the kinds of identities that subsequent generations would adopt as Thatcher’s “new under class” began to have children and families. As portrayed in such recent reality BBC television mini-series as *The Scheme* (2010) and *Tower Block of Commons* (2010), social isolation, crime, violence, and drug abuse have become part of many council estate residents’ historical identities. In this section, I turn to the figure of baby Dawn as an embodiment of the kinds of futures Welsh imagines for many state-reliant working-class children of the Thatcher revolution. I am interested here especially in the figure of the infant corpse, what Kristeva proposes as the most intense representation of the

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<sup>46</sup> Some sources, such as the Guardian, suggest that the problem persists and the deaths continue into the present. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/aug/15/scotland-trainspotting-generation-dying-fact> for a further exposition.

abject, as it becomes the “monstrous body, an abject concrete materialization” of the struggles between ideas of solidarity and community on the one hand and neoliberal individualism on the other (Burke 182). Such struggles lead to what Peter Lee calls “the new poor” (in opposition to the Tory coined and derogative “under class”) as he tries to locate the “increased detachment from the reproductive (family) sphere” in the 1980s within the Thatcherite urban spaces of council estates (Lee 1196).

Renton oscillates between sobriety and heroin addiction throughout the novel, and his responses to his surroundings are varied as a result. In the section “It goes Without Saying,” Renton’s bewildered and fearful response to baby Dawn’s death is far removed from the version we get of him in “Winter in West Granton,” where he is able to draw connections between contemporary society and Tommy’s spatialized identity. In “It Goes Without Saying,” Renton’s addiction is so actively intense that he is unsure how long he has been passed out on the floor when he is jarred awake by Lesley’s screams at the discovery of Dawn dead in her cot – the “searin’ racket comin fae ootside the room” (Welsh 51). While Renton looks in the direction of Lesley sobbing on the “threadbare couch,” he focuses “oan a brown stain oan the wall above her,” where one might expect a painting or decoration, in a way that draws a distinct connection between Lesley’s trauma and the dilapidated state of the council flat. He questions the presence of the stain (“[w]hit the fuck was it? How did it get there?”(51)) in a way that could also be read as “what the fuck am I? How did I get here?” Renton’s bewilderment at how the “brown stain” got there, or what the substance may even be, mark both his feelings about Lesley’s devastation and, more broadly, a kind of disorientation surrounding his generation’s new status as the “brown stain” on society. Renton is thus unable to form a clear understanding of himself or his

surroundings, and, as Kristeva would argue, he becomes abject as “meaning collapses.” The walls of the flat where baby Dawn dies, similar to the walls in “Winter in West Granton,” are represented not only as the boundaries between the domestic and seemingly more public spaces of the derelict corridors and potentially violent stairways of the scheme, but also as significant markers of social class and identity. While the walls of Tommy’s home draw a clear connection between the body, disease, and the spaces of the council flat, the stain on the wall above Lesley frames Renton’s understanding of his own, and his cohorts’, desperate subjectivity within British society. In this way, Renton’s focus on the walls of the flat draw attention to Karnicky’s thesis that “the political power of Welsh’s fiction lies not just in these realistic representations” (such as the stained walls and the infant corpse) “but also in the creative potentials that the novels engender” (138). It is the relationship between the infant corpse and the stained walls, the abject beside, that becomes so deeply political.

Thatcher’s assault on the working classes, and the subsequent spatialized fracture of the working class through de-industrialization, leads abject identities such as Renton to re-imagine their sociopolitical role in society. In this sense, Welsh illustrates a kind of political ambivalence as the characters’ ideological positions often change according to convenience and, in the case of “It Goes Without Saying,” personal safety. The sense of working-class solidarity and community felt during, for example, the miners’ strikes in the early 1980s, is deeply ruptured and replaced here by self-interest. Spud’s desire to “stick wi Les ... Like, mates n that,” and thus enact a sense of “solidarity,” a word that invokes ideas of working-class identity, unions, and community, is for Renton and Matty “a bit ay a fanciful notion in the circumstances” (Welsh 53). As Renton remarks: “on the issue of drugs, wi were classical liberals, vehemently opposed to state intervention” (53). The Thatcherite chipping

away at a cohesive working-class identity that might identify itself as separate from a consumerist, corporate culture, and the refusal to include such an identity as a viable entity in British politics and society, renders characters such as Renton and his friends unable to anchor their reactions to each other and the world around them. Their historical identities have been uprooted through Thatcherite intervention and, as a result, they no longer have a collective ideological framework by which to move through their lives. The Thatcherite ideal of individualism, then, becomes part of their fractured partial perspectives: while on the topic of drugs they are “classic liberals,” in the rest of their lives they freely access state benefits and health care. The struggle is not over whether they should stand beside Lesley because of their class solidarity or personal loyalty but rather, in the end, over whether they as individuals want to risk being caught by the police if they flee the flat and baby Dawn’s corpse.

There is a specific distinction in this passage between the street, which contains the threat of police apprehension and incarceration, and the flat, which represents a place forgotten by the state. Abject addiction and death thus go undetected and unrecognized. As Renton notes in “Winter in West Granton,” the estates themselves become like prisons, and the streets surrounding them are the spaces where the lower classes are patrolled and where, often, they clash with each other.<sup>47</sup> As I argue in chapter one, in many British urban centres, the streets became, as Stuart Hall suggests, contested spaces that saw “the emergence of new subjects, new genders, new ethnicities, new regions, [and] new communities” (“Old and New Identities” 34). While Hall’s proposition sounds promising and hopeful, in the most forgotten spaces, such as dilapidated Scottish housing schemes like Muirhouse and

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<sup>47</sup> For more on clashes on the street in and around council estates, see Campbell.

West Granton, the emergence of these new subjectivities is insidiously informed through intimidation, violence, fear of other residents and, perhaps more significantly, an intimidating police presence.<sup>48</sup>

However, the fears and suspicions inspired by the perception of the street at times arouse temporary forms of community. As Kelly argues, under these circumstances, “community only congregates through a vicious victimization of others and is forged through violence” (60). While in “Winter in West Granton” such “community” takes the form of stigmatizing Tommy as HIV positive and drug addicted, in this section, the imagined victimization and violence represented by the police on the street create the conditions necessary to form a temporary community. The presence of the police is always potentially present, because, as Renton says, “outside there were pigs cruising about. At least, that’s how it felt” (53). The street, then, is not so much, as de Certeau argues, a space for pedestrian narrative, but rather a place where class differences, and state interests in reinforcing such differences, are identified and policed. As such, Renton, Matty, Spud and Sick Boy create a temporary kind of community based on class as well as self-interest in avoiding incarceration by the police on the street outside.

There is a clear emphasis in “It Goes Without Saying” on the relationship between the abject figure of the corpse and the space of the council flat. Beyond the obvious horrors of the death of an infant and what that represents to those affected by it, baby Dawn’s corpse is abject partially because of the unknowability that it represents. Not only is the cause of her death unknown, but so too is the way in which Renton and the others will be able to escape unscathed from their predicament. They are in this sense trapped within the flat as a result of heroin addiction, the death of baby Dawn, and, more broadly, their

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<sup>48</sup> For more on police and council estates, see Campbell.

stigmatized and isolated position in society. By “cooking up” again, Renton returns to a corpse-like state because, as he rationalizes to Tommy early in the novel, heroin use

... kinday makes things seem mair real tae us. Life's boring and futile. We start oaf wi high hopes, then we bottle it. We realize that we're aw gaunnae die, without really finding oot the big answers. We develop aw they long-winded ideas which just interpret the reality ay oor lives in different weys, withoot really extending oor body ay worthwhile knowledge, about the big things, the real things. Basically, we live a short, disappointing life; and then we die. We fill up oor lives wi shite, things like careers and relationships tae delude oorsels that it isnae aw totally pointless. Smack's an honest drug, because it strips away these delusions. Wi smack, whin ye feel good, ye feel immortal. Whin ye feel bad, it intensifies the shite that's already thair. It's the only real honest drug. It doesnae alter yir consciousness. It just gies ye a hit and a sense ay well-being. Eftir that, ye see the misery ay the world as it is, and ye cannae anaesthetize yirsel against it. (89-90)

The embrace of abjection through addiction allows Renton to temporarily ignore his socioeconomically and politically abject subject position and, in turn, become numb in the prison of the council estate. His use, then, is an attempt to control his own abjection.

As an abject body, baby Dawn represents the futures of the next generation of state-reliant identities that come after Renton and his cohort, a new generation equally fraught with abject potentialities. As Peter Lee has suggested, the kinds of socioeconomic shifts that were spatially evident in the mid-1980s became part of the legacy for future generations to incorporate into their own historical identities. Renton and his friends are no longer identified as contributors to society through their working-class heritage, but rather

have become “consumers who consume that which will destroy them, their former identities and attachments” (Kelly 47). The idea of the family, and all of the familial and societal traditions that contribute to identity formations, have been disrupted and replaced with a foundation of stigmatization, isolation, and fear. There is no other possible future for baby Dawn but to succumb to that by which she is surrounded. Baby Dawn, with all of the connotations of brightness and beginnings implied by her name, is brought to a desperately ironic end as Renton, Sick Boy, Matty, and Spud look down into the crib and witness her corpse with the realization that though the *cause* of her death may remain traumatically unknowable, the *fact* of her death is not surprising within the space of the council flat. The inevitability of her abject destiny, then, becomes an essential quality of their abject sociohistorical situation and of the abject space that they occupy.

### **“House Arrest”: Heroin, Family, and the Spaces of Kicking**

In the section “House Arrest,” Welsh foregrounds the dialectic relationship between space and identity in an episode in which Renton, in an attempt to withdraw from heroin, is held captive by his caring parents in their “Housing Association flat by the river” (190). The rhetoric of enforcement and imprisonment is still part of Renton’s understanding of the council flat (“I am tae be under house arrest”); however, in this section the incarceration is proposed as a way out of the broader entrapment of heroin addiction (192). While “Winter in West Granton” and “It Goes Without Saying” foreground the rupture of family within the spaces of dilapidated housing estates, “House Arrest” forges significantly different familial dialectics within the space of the well-maintained council flat in which Renton’s parents live. While both Tommy and Lesley eventually succumb to heroin addiction and disease within dilapidated council flats surrounded by broken and fractured familial situations,

Renton's relative removal from what Peter Lee calls the "undeserving poor", or "under class" (Lee 1193), is arguably tied to his successful detox from heroin. However, Renton imagines his parent's actions as well-intentioned yet uninformed: "They mean well, and they mean well tae me, but there's nae way under the sun that they can appreciate what ah feel, what ah need" (Welsh 190). Despite his parents' best efforts, Renton's comments here are perhaps doubly significant, in that they refer both to his immediate situation as a heroin addict and, more broadly, to his acute awareness of the intense sociopolitical stigmatization that his generation must endure growing up "in an era ay mass unemployment" (191). In this sense, "heroin becomes a potent floating signifier of social pathology, political dependence, and consumer capitalism" (Morace 46).

Again, Welsh foregrounds the spatiality, specifically the walls, of the council flat as a marker of the dialectic relationship between the individual and space in "House Arrest." The walls of the flat duplicitously reflect back to Renton his role as an unemployed working-class identity in a decreasingly socialist welfare state, as well as reminding him of the kinds of regrets and traumas he has experienced as a result of such social stigmatization and his subsequent choices. Renton's descriptions of the walls in the two sections I have already discussed involve either the kind of unknowability he articulates in "It Goes Without Saying" or the "terrifying" (314) experience of the vandalized and cracked walls of "Winter in West Granton." Perhaps more positively, the walls in "House Arrest" are haunted by familiar artifacts of his youth as he awakens in his "auld bedroom, in the parental home," and it is under such circumstances that he begins to "piece thegither how [he's] goat there" (188). Notably, however, there is a distance between Renton and his adolescent self, a self arguably more innocent and free than the drug addicted older Renton,

which is both alienating and troubling. As a child, Renton put posters on his bedroom walls (“Paddy Stanton ... wi his seventies sideboards” and “Iggy Pop ... smashing a pile ay records”) to establish a space that reflected his identity; now, as an adult, he imagines these decorations as a kind of papering-over of the walls’ broader social significance (188). Similar to the graffiti scrawled outside of Tommy’s flat, or the brown stain above Lesley as she sobs on the couch, these markers of identity and traces of a knowable, or unknowable, history and future are etched on the walls as a kind of textual sign of space and identity.

During Renton’s convalescence, the walls in his bedroom become animated in a way that suggests even the most comfortable and well-maintained council flats are haunted by the kinds of disenfranchisement, “anxiety,” and “fear” that Wright and Hanley argue are so deeply associated with the spaces of council estates. As a result, baby Dawn’s death is not simply contained within the spatiohistorical bounds of the squatted council flat where her corpse is discovered, but also exists, for example, within the seemingly knowable spaces of Renton’s childhood bedroom. As Renton begins to hallucinate during his withdrawal, he sees “[w]ee Dawn, crawlin along the ceilin,” like a “vampire” “covered in sick yellow-green slime,” with an accusing voice that repeatedly screams “yefuckinkilledme” (196). As Renton’s psychosis increases, Dawn falls from the ceiling onto his bed as his “fingers rip and tear at the soft, plasticine flesh and messy gunge” (196). This grotesque manifestation of baby Dawn embodies Renton’s anxieties and regret surrounding her death, and it is through his hallucinatory contact with Kristeva’s most abject figure, the infant corpse, that Renton also confronts the intense abject dialectics of his own identity within and around the spaces of council flats. The abject hopelessness of his own, and future, generations is reflected upon the walls of the council flat, and the result

is impossibly terrifying. Renton is, in this sense, imprisoned by his traumatic identity as it is trapped between, and projected upon, the walls and spaces of the council flats where he remains under “house arrest.”

During Renton’s convalescence he considers the social significance of the space that the council has provided for his family. As Peter Lee suggests, “local housing and economic conditions, together with welfare delivery, interact to produce new regions of social exclusion” (Lee 1192). “[T]he rationing of quality and poor rented housing stock,” Lee continues, “has the hallmarks of underclass typology - a classification of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor” (1192). As Renton recalls, his family moved into Lee’s “deserving poor” category once his severely handicapped brother was born and the council deemed his family a higher priority for safer and more reliable housing stock. Renton considers the gossip surrounding their move: “they think thit her n ma faither used Davie’s profound handicap tae git oot ay the Fort n git this nice Housing Association flat by the river, then cynically dumped the poor cunt in the residential care” (Welsh 190).<sup>49</sup> While Tommy, in “Winter in West Granton,” is relegated to a council flat that nobody else wants because he is desperate enough to take it, Renton’s family is re-classed as the “deserving poor” because of his brother’s disability.<sup>50</sup> Such differences, as Renton acknowledges, are reified in and through the spaces of the council estates.

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<sup>49</sup> The “Fort,” as Renton refers to it, was one of the most notoriously drug and crime infested housing estates in Edinburgh. The tower block is set to be demolished in November, 2012.

<sup>50</sup> The film adaptation omits the conversations and questions of solidarity, the rupture of family, and Renton’s handicapped brother that all take place in and through the spaces of the council estates. In leaving out these kinds of details, Boyle’s rendition of *Trainspotting* achieves a limited amount of sociohistorical commentary by portraying a somewhat fashionable rendering of the rise of heroin addiction and HIV infection in 1980s Scotland.

The gossip and suspicion his family encounters as a result of their move away from the “Fort” gestures to the divisiveness that permeates Thatcher’s unemployed working classes. Renton bridges “the mythology in a place like Leith” (190) to the historical identities that are formed and reformed in and through the spaces of the council estates in a way that imagines, as Patrick Wright has proposed, “the tower block [a]s a machine for inducing paranoia ... its supposedly communal spaces are filled with anxiety, suspicion, and fear” (*Journey 2*). For Renton and his neighbours, part of their historical identity within the estates is taken up with “anxiety” and “suspicion” of each other, the state, and their bleak futures. Such anxiety follows Renton’s family as others in their new estate “by the river” “suspect the auld man” for his Glaswegian accent and his adaptation to unemployment by working in the local flea markets rather than “sittin in Strathie’s Bar,” their “communal space” where gossiping and “moanin” (Welsh 190) take up Wright’s “anxiety, suspicion, and fear.”

Welsh’s novel, then, is “not merely about heroin as such but instead utilizes the drug’s social environment to mediate upon the paradigm shifts that ruptured traditional working-class identity and community in the late 1970s and 1980s” (Kelly 38). The “anxiety” and “suspicion” are felt not only as a result of abject drug abuse and crime, but also the intense neoliberal individualism that inevitably infected the residents of council estates desperate to gain some form of material wealth that would simultaneously ensure them, as Thatcher and Douglas Hurd insisted, a sense of identity and citizenship.

### **Conclusion: The Production of Spatialized Identities**

Renton’s only escape from heroin addiction and hopeless unemployment is to leave not only his housing situation behind, but to move away from Edinburgh entirely and live in

London - a place where he begins to take on more fully the Thatcherite sentiments of individualism and desire for material wealth. However, after stealing from his friends the illicit fortune gained from a drug deal, Renton leaves Britain for Europe. Such a move suggests that though a windfall of cash may change Renton's financial position, such escape or mobility must come at the cost of allegiance to those he has known for his entire life. Such a mapping of class and opportunity, the relationship between London in the South and Edinburgh in the North, and more broadly Europe, reinserts the notion of spatiality into the conversation about class. As Morace notes, "having grown up in an era of Thatcher-induced mass unemployment, the characters [in *Trainspotting*] are also cut off from their parents' working-class roots" (45). Welsh's novel portrays the ways in which individuals are forced to find new ways to form identities outside of a historical sense of self. Such new identity formations are deeply reliant on the ways in which space is occupied, dominated and, more broadly, perceived by the general public. In this way, "*Trainspotting* is observant rather than nostalgic" (Morace 45). As Kelly argues, Welsh's work is not a political counterpoint, but rather a representation of "ordinary people's lives and activities that have become increasingly disaffected from the major institutions of state and society" (Kelly 8). While the Tories wished to promote the notion of a classless society under free market policies, the stark reality was that the 1980s was a period of deepening class divisions resulting from the weakening of the unions and the growing middle classes. Such divisions were felt sociopolitically as well as spatially. As Welsh's work demonstrates, the discursive categories of class and space are always dialectally engaged with the ways in which identities are formed and reformed.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Space, Production, and Identity: Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Powellite Englishness

*"The city shattered ... these shards of the broken city."* (Ali 91)

*"identity is always in the process of formation."* (Hall, "Old and New Identities" 47)

In my previous chapter I argued that Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* represents the spaces of tower blocks as dialectically engaged in abject identity formations. In this chapter I look to the way that Monica Ali's 2003 novel, *Brick Lane*, represents marginalized immigrant identities, specifically as embodied by the principal character, Nazneen, as they form in and through the domestic and urban spaces of Brick Lane and Tower Hamlets council estate in London's East End. While Ali's representation of the East End differs from the spaces that Iain Sinclair excavates in *Lights Out for the Territory*, *Brick Lane* nevertheless similarly approaches the "pedestrian narrative" (de Certeau) as a way of knowing oneself in the city. As Claire Alexander argues, the spaces Ali portrays in *Brick Lane* represent "contested and porous boundaries of both material and imagined spaces" in a way that "recognizes the role of the agency and subjectivity of individuals and groups within those spaces" (204).

In what follows, I investigate representations in Ali's novel of identity formation within immigrant communities, as individuals within those communities struggle between tradition, multiculturalism, nostalgia and notions of home. As the novel's protagonist, Nazneen, attempts to settle as an immigrant in London, she moves beyond the confines of her council flat into the city in a way that illustrates Stuart Hall's processes of identity

formation in and through the negotiation and navigation of public and private spaces in the Thatcherite/post-Thatcherite city (Hall, “Old and New” 47). Ali’s text explores new formations of diasporic identities within Thatcherite/post-Thatcherite urban spaces in a way that subverts notions of nostalgia while at the same time representing a new, and arguably problematic, kind of Britishness deeply reliant on the Thatcherite discourse of entrepreneurialism. This new kind of Britishness in many ways directly confronts the racist and nationalist dogma voiced by Enoch Powell in the late 1960s. Ali proposes a Britishness that moves beyond the Powellite invading “other” in favour of a spatially engaged identity that stands outside of nostalgic notions of home and nation, incorporating itself instead into the city through practices of engagement and, perhaps most significantly (and even ironically), Thatcherite-endorsed modes of production. Ultimately, the Britishness that Ali imagines for Nazneen, however, is shadowed by a kind of melancholy, or loss, as Nazneen chooses financial and sociocultural independence over access to a broader sense of community and tradition.

*Brick Lane*, Ali’s first novel, was met with instant fame in the publishing world and controversy in local London Muslim communities. Based on only a few initial manuscript chapters, *Granta* listed Ali as one of its best young authors, and in 2003 the novel was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for fiction. While some reviewers praised the novel for being “warm, shrewd, startling and hugely readable: the sort of book you race through greedily, dreading the last page” (Lane), many in the Bangladeshi community were outraged by what they perceived to be a “portray[al of] Bangladeshis in *Brick Lane* as backward, uneducated and unsophisticated” (Taylor). Protesters were deeply concerned with what they imagined to be a “completely stereotypical view of Bangladeshis living in

Brick Lane and one we simply do not recognise. The book says we got here by jumping ships and it says we have lice and live like rats in their holes. These comments are simply untrue and hurtful” (Taylor). The protests, similar to the Muslim outcry that met Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses*, and often only tenuously related to the actual narrative of the novel, settled on fears and objections encircling popularly consumed representations of Muslim culture, and specifically addressed stereotypical representations of the British Bangladeshi community in and around Brick Lane.

While the intense controversy that welcomed the release of *Brick Lane* raised sociocultural concerns regarding popular portrayals of marginalized populations in London more generally, Smith’s novel is specifically concerned with representations of private and public identities within the spaces of Tower Hamlets and East London in the Thatcher and post-Thatcher years. Sukhdev Sandhu argues in his review of the novel that *Brick Lane* “focus[es] almost entirely on the lives of Bangladeshi women in Tower Hamlets” in a way that “takes us beyond the yellowing net curtains of their cramped tower-block flats, and into their living-rooms and bedrooms” (“Come Hungry, Leave Edgy”). Yet while Sandhu finds fault with Ali’s lack of specific references to historical spaces when he says that “to write about this area today or make sense of its cuspy, transitional status, one has to write about what went on before,” setting the novel in Brick Lane during the 1980s and beyond surely already provides a sociocultural backdrop that is much more than, as Sandhu suggests, a “desultory account” of life in the area. By situating the novel in 1980s Brick Lane, Ali already infuses the narrative with the nuances of the sociopolitical struggles and, to borrow from Swyngedouw, spatial scales of the area. As the next section of the present chapter fleshes out, the struggle over what it means to be British has long been fought in British

urban spaces, particularly in the Thatcher and post-Thatcher periods, and as such marks specific events of urban unrest alluded to throughout Ali's narrative.

The novel's gestures towards specific historical moments and events provide the necessary sociocultural and political context for the conflicts for which Enoch Powell set the stage in the late 1960s. The struggle to determine how, and at what cost, English working-class identity and, in turn, national identity, could be preserved possessed Powell in the 1960s, and continued well into the 1980s and beyond. Ali's positioning of emerging immigrant identities within the Tower Hamlets area of London during the 1980s and after provides the cultural and political subtext for an analysis of the ongoing struggle over possible definitions of British identity. It becomes difficult to separate individual identity from a broader sense of community when it is precisely the common spaces that individual and community occupy that come to define them both. In that sense, Powell's desire to segregate, and indeed to eliminate, immigrant identities from working-class English populations and spaces was born of a desire to preserve a particular sense of Englishness rather than promote a sense of Britishness defined broadly enough to include space, rather than race, as a common denominator.

The sociocultural representations Ali offers in *Brick Lane* confront the "completely stereotypical view of Bangladeshis" espoused by figures such as Enoch Powell in the 1960s as they move in and through the diasporic spaces of London's East End in an exploration of the dialectic relationship between identity, space, and capital. This dialectic, as Homi Bhabha would argue, is located "in the emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - [where] the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (2). With

this in mind, I investigate the ways in which individual identity is formed in and through the urban spaces that Ali represents in her novel, as she foregrounds issues of race and class in ways that seek to disrupt, rather than invoke, cultural stereotypes.

### **Community, Identity, and Space**

It may be useful here to remind ourselves of Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as "an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (5-6). It is "*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of the communion" (6). According to Anderson, though members of any particular community may be distant and disparate, they are linked together through their ability to imagine that community as distinct. In the case of Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this meant that the individual British citizen was able to conceptualize himself as part of the British Empire and the colonial effort in which the empire was so engaged, even if he were stationed in Ceylon or India, because of his role as a British subject and his belief in that role.

As Anderson further suggests, the nation "is imagined as *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (6). The individuals within the nation are, as Anderson argues, "comrades" able to imagine themselves as possessing similar struggles and goals despite differences in class or race. (Such formulations were almost impossible for immigrant identities in post-war Britain.) Such specific struggles and goals are always spatially fixed to the geographic commonality of Britain. Linda Colley develops Anderson's theory of nationhood when she says that

if we accept Benedict Anderson's admittedly loose, but for that reason invaluable definition of a nation as 'an imagined political community', and if we accept also that, historically speaking, most nations have always been culturally and ethnically diverse, problematic, protean and artificial constructs that take shape very quickly and come apart just as fast, then we can plausibly regard Great Britain as an invented nation superimposed if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties. (5)

Colley's argument is significant because it assumes that the British nation is comprised of various different cultures and identities (including Scottish, Welsh, and Irish) that have come together to form "an imagined community." Further, her reminder that Great Britain is an "invented nation superimposed onto much older alignments and loyalties" implies a kind of tenuousness that she insists can be sustained "only for a while." In this sense, as Bhabha suggests, as immigrant identities begin to have a more profound presence in British urban spaces, the idea of "imagined community" takes on a different aura: "this side of psychosis of patriotic fervor, I like to think, there is overwhelming evidence of a more transnational and translational sense of hybridity of imagined communities" (7). In Ali's novel, Nazneen begins to understand a kind of "imagined community" dominant in contemporary London in the form of capitalism in a way that moves beyond local issues of racism and classism, while at the same time remaining deeply rooted to the urban as a place for the exchanges of commerce and daily life. Ali thus imagines a sense of Britishness that rejects the nostalgic working-class Englishness that Powell holds up in favour of a hybrid Britishness based, perhaps ironically, on Thatcherite notions of entrepreneurialism and financial individualism.

At the same time, Anderson argues that national identity is not an ideology in the same way as, to use one of his examples, “liberalism” may be understood to be (5). So while he insists that national identity is an “imagined political community,” Anderson also suggests that it is not ideological, since it is something that every individual inherently possesses. He further argues that “it would...make things easier if one treated [the idea of ‘imagined community’] as if it belonged with ‘kinship’ and ‘religion’, rather than with ‘liberalism’ or ‘fascism’” (5). The distinction between religion and ideology is significant because it suggests that the individual need only possess a certain belief, or faith, in order to become part of an “imagined community.” This kind of imagining, Anderson argues, was initially forged in language and, perhaps more significantly, in the capitalist endeavours of the printing, publication, and dissemination of written language, which he locates in the sixteenth century and the beginning of a print culture that made possible “the generation of wholly new ideas of simultaneity” that helped make the “nation so popular” (37). In this sense, Anderson intimately forges a connection between capitalism, language, and national identity in a way that also relies heavily on urban spaces as material locations for such connections, through printing houses, distribution stations, and places where capital can accumulate.

For Anderson, the marriage of language and capitalism was integral to the formation of identity that moved beyond the local to the national: “the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation” (46). In contrast, while Tom Nairn finds common ground with Anderson in the belief that “nationalism is a crucial, fairly central feature of the modern capitalist

development of world history” (331), he argues, against Anderson, that nationalism is “ideology ... it is not nature” (334),<sup>51</sup> insisting on an explicit link between power and nationalism:

The mobilizing myth of nationalism is an idea of the people. This must not be confused with an abstract concept - for example - with the virtue of The Working Class. It has to be a concrete, emotive notion anchored in popular experience or lore. This idea depicts (supposedly) self-initiated action of the people: the Revolution, the Overthrow of Foreign Oppression, the War of Liberation, (and so on). (295)

Nairn envisions a “myth of nationalism,” arising out of a common “popular experience” or a common understood “myth” or “lore” of what Peter Mandler might call “national character.” The idea of “myth” or “lore” is similar to Anderson’s idea of “imagined community,” based as it is on a historical commonality that each member of the community “imagine[s]” as true. However, while Anderson suggests that the nation and, in turn, national identity, are natural occurrences arising out of a common language and the effects of print culture, Nairn sees the idea of nationalism as inherently tied to ideology because it is always imposed on the individual from without.<sup>52</sup> This echoes Colley’s reminder that the

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<sup>51</sup> M. Speiring also encounters the notion of national identity and ideology: “National identity, and by implication English identity, is what people feel it to be. National identity is an image, it carries meaning in the sense that it abides in feelings and convictions; often it is part and parcel of an ideology” (8). While Speiring does not suggest that national identity is inherently ideological, he does present a halfway point between Anderson’s organic sense of national identity and Nairn’s polemic definition. Speiring goes on to say that “national identity is no ontological category, but a form of cultural production” (11), thus asserting that “the terms ‘English’ and ‘English national identity’ are self-defining or, rather, user-defined” (10).

<sup>52</sup> It could be argued that Anderson is working from a nineteenth-century definition of ideology based on, as Raymond Williams partially defines in *Keywords*, the idea that ideology is “illusion, false consciousness, unreality, upside-down reality” (156). However, Nairn’s Marxist approach to ideology must derive from, as

idea of Britain was really an “invented nation superimposed if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties.”

### **Race and Class: Enoch Powell, the 1960s, and the 1970s**

The sociocultural divisions that became apparent as the British nation turned inwards after the Suez crisis were deeply rooted, as Peter Mandler argues, in various political and public spheres. British people no longer had global imperialism, and the ubiquitous colonial Other, by which to define their sense of national belonging. As such, immigration, unemployment, global recession, and massive union strikes throughout the 1970s and early 1980s produced a series of conflicts that divided, and defined, the nation itself – struggles that, as critics such as Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Tom Nairn, and Peter Mandler have pointed out, marked the symptoms of decline of British national identity. This section of my chapter investigates the sociopolitical fallout from Enoch Powell’s “Rivers of Blood” speech delivered in April of 1968, and explores the ways in which ideas of race and class became sociopolitically linked as urban social strife took on increasingly significant dimensions during the 1970s and 1980s.

This discussion thus anchors my examination of Ali’s novel as it helps to contextualize the sociopolitical backdrop of immigrant identities living in council housing during the Thatcher period. Throughout the 1980s and after, race, ethnicity, material wealth, and the struggle over nostalgic notions of home remained at the root of the processes of identity formation for immigrant identities as well as Powell’s traditional working-class English identities. While Powell’s nostalgic desire was to maintain English identity through the rejection of immigration, Ali’s novel subverts Powellite fears of

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Williams points out, a “set of ideas which arise from a given set of material interests or, more broadly, from a definite class or group.”

hybridity through the way it rewrites the Tory campaign slogan “He’s Not Black, He’s British” as it foregrounds, yet at the same time troubles, Thatcherite notions of citizenship based on sociospatial identity formation and the accumulation of wealth.

Enoch Powell delivered his infamous “Rivers of Blood” speech to Conservative constituents in Birmingham in April 1968. The speech attacked immigration, specifically the Race Relations Act of the same year, as responsible for increasing crime and violence in city centres across Britain, as well as for representing an imminent threat to English (particularly working-class) identity and opportunity.<sup>53</sup> In his speech, Powell declared it was his responsibility as a British MP to draw attention to what he saw as the inevitable and “total transformation of British society of which there was no parallel in British history” (Powell). He called not only for a halt on immigration to “negligible levels,” but also for a policy of “re-emigration” to be installed in order to stop what he envisioned as the “nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre,” further remarking that “the discrimination and deprivation, the sense of alarm and of resentment, lies not with the immigrant population but with those among whom they have come and are still coming” (Powell). Insisting that his was merely a representative voice speaking on behalf of the average British citizen, Powell argued that it was not the wishes of Britons that such high levels of immigration be maintained. He added portentously that “for reasons which they could not comprehend, and in pursuance of a decision by default, on which the British people were never consulted, they found themselves strangers in their own country” (Powell).

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<sup>53</sup> There were two Race Relations Acts in the mid-1960s. In 1965 and in 1968, they both outlawed discrimination. More specifically, they “made it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of colour, race or ethnic origin in the provision of goods, facilities, housing accommodation or land” (Jones 146). Failure to follow the legislation became a civil offence.

Using the language of slavery, anarchy, and fear, Powell recounted in his speech recent “conversations” with local constituents fearful for their own, and their families’, wellbeing in the face of increasing immigrant populations. These urban working-class British identities included an “unnamed working man employed in one of our nationalized industries,” and a “white ... woman ... old-age pensioner” who had been in contact with Powell about fears that their communities were being “taken over” and turned into “place[s] of noise and confusion” (Powell). As Sandbrook suggests, “domesticity [was often] placed at the centre of British character” (31), and Powell here uses the figure of the white “old age pensioner” as a symbol for the decline of English identity rooted within domestic space. The fear, as Powell reported, was that “in 15 or 20 years time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man” (Powell).

The threat to the working class, as Powell argued in his nostalgic attempt to define a particular Englishness, was simultaneously a threat to the Orwellian English national character occupied with gardening, “stamp-collecting,” “darts,” “the pub,” “football,” “the fireside,” and the ubiquitous “cup of tea” (Orwell 75-79).<sup>54</sup> As Robert Colls argues, many of the Orwellian English characteristics were located in working-class areas of England: “It was believed that working-class values could be found by simply going round England and, as it were, breathing in: the grittiness of factory winds; the close pack of pubs and football matches; the warmth of the family circle, by the fireside, or at Blackpool...” (187).

Ironically, Powell failed to imagine or anticipate the kinds of attacks on the working

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<sup>54</sup> Stuart Hall’s definition of heritage is significant in this context. Hall defines heritage as “the whole complex of organizations, institutions and practices devoted to the preservation and presentation of culture and the arts.” He goes on further to focus on the British use of the word that places an “emphasis [on] preservation and conservation: to keeping what already exists” (“Whose Heritage?” 23). Along these lines, figures such as Powell are interested not in working out a new formation of national identity, but rather in battling against the influx of immigration in order to hold on to the Orwellian ideas of English heritage and identity, including the spaces and traditions of communities throughout the imperial era.

classes, by his definition the heart of English identity, that would occur not at the “whip hand” of the immigrant populations he so feared, but rather at the hands of the Tory party itself under Thatcher (Powell). By appealing to the working classes and the perceived threat to Orwellian English culture, Powell directly linked questions of immigration to the difficulties experienced by an authentic “English” populace; as a result, it was the working classes themselves that revolted and marched in his defense when Edward Heath fired him for his inflammatory and racist remarks.<sup>55</sup>

The April 1968 edition of *The Observer* announced in its special feature, “Stop Shouting, Start Talking,” that “the spectacle of British working men taking to the streets in protest at Mr. Enoch Powell’s sacking for his explosive speech on race has produced a deep sense of shock.” Not only was Powell’s language distressing in its racist sentiment, so too was the support that he gleaned, as a Tory, from working-class men, specifically unionized dockers (traditionally Labour supporters) who marched to the parliament buildings in support of Powell.<sup>56</sup> The dockers’ march on Parliament, as Stuart Hall suggests, brought about the realization that Powell’s speech was “a call to mobilization... for people who held

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<sup>55</sup> The idea of class is always of central significance to any discussion of British national identity, and no less so in the earlier half of the twentieth century. As Sandbrook suggests, “[c]lass was not merely a matter of money; what determined one’s position was a complicated network of factors: birth, breeding, and education, occupation, income, expenditure, accent and deportment, friendships, political and cultural attitudes and values” (32). The influx of immigrant populations invariably had an impact on such complicated social structures, as neighborhoods, friendships, workplaces, languages, and familial traditions became heterogeneous and hybridized. Sandbrook suggests that in the 1950s and 1960s “around two-thirds of the British public thought that they were working-class” (32). As such, Powell’s appeal was to a great majority of white British people.

<sup>56</sup> “Rivers of Blood” is part of a series of documentaries aired on, and produced by, BBC2 with the umbrella title “White: Is the White Working Class Becoming Invisible?” The series looks at the history and impact of British immigration and race relations in the post-war period and its effects on white working-class communities. It could be argued that such a series presents figures such as Powell in an auspicious light in order to shore up national support around contemporary issues of terrorism and mass unemployment. The juxtaposition that such a series intentionally constructs between Powellite politics and the events of 7/7 in London certainly support such an argument.

racist ideas anyway” (BBC “Rivers of Blood”). Lord Heseltine, remembering the days following Powell’s speech, recalled that

[t]he atmosphere was electric. If Enoch Powell had stood to be the leader of the Conservative Party he’d have had a landslide at that weekend. And, I daresay, if he then stood to be Prime Minister, he’d have had a national landslide. It was that dramatic – the degree of support and the intensity of it. (BBC “Rivers of Blood”)

As reported in the BBC documentary “Rivers of Blood,” Powell had approximately 80% of popular support around that time, suggesting, as Lord Hattersley commented, that Powell had given a public voice to the feelings of racism that had been percolating, in earnest, since the Notting Hill riots of 1958; in that sense, “racism had been made respectable” because it was no longer remanded to violent struggles on the street but rather had become a subject for parliamentary debate.<sup>57</sup>

Hall notes the alterations in urban working-class communities as “black and Asian people moved into space that had been thought of as white working-class areas,” and goes on to suggest that “one must imagine that Englishness is not only a property of the middle classes” but that “there was a distinct sense of [a] working class [that] had its own traditions, [and] its own culture. It had a very distinct English character” (BBC “Rivers of Blood”). As Ali’s *Brick Lane* portrays, the struggles over the culture and space of “white working-class areas” were often violently played out in council estates such as the Tower Hamlets where the working classes were no longer simply English in the Powellite sense, but rather increasingly hybrid in terms of ethnicity and race. Hall recognizes the cultural

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<sup>57</sup> See Colin MacInnes’s *Absolute Beginners* for a brilliant fictional representation of the Notting Hill riots and the urban spaces of London during the late 1950s.

differences between Black, Asian, and English when he connects the idea of “space” to notions of “tradition” and “culture,” and by locating immigrant populations within working-class communities, he gestures towards the intimate connection between race and class. Nairn agrees that “England’s coloured minority ... is, in fact, almost entirely proletarian in character, and unlikely to be anything else for some time to come” (276). It is in this sense that Nairn and Hall locate the struggle of race and class within British urban centres, since it is within those urban centres that most of the working class lived. The problem, then, was not in the country, but specifically in the city. While Powell located the heart of English national identity in white working-class neighborhoods, Hall observes that the space, culture, and employment available in such neighborhoods was being taken up with the “other” and in turn transforming English national identity.<sup>58</sup>

In keeping with Krishan Kumar’s belief that Powell “was not so much a racist as an English nationalist” (267),<sup>59</sup> Hall further suggests that though Powell’s speech was inflammatory in its sentiment and language, it was nevertheless earnest in its approach, coming as it was from “an Englishman’s gut” that feared the loss of a traditional identity founded on a distant objectification of the “other” rather than a shared community with that “other.” Of course, the impact of immigration on working-class communities and national identity was not a new issue; the racist and abject language used by Powell simply inflamed

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<sup>58</sup> M. Speiring argues that “according to some, the new Britain of government committees and development corporations exposed the individual to ‘the most serious of modern ills’, that is alienation or the weakening of the ‘sense of community membership. Thus the optimism of the advocates of change was countered by feelings of anxiety about the loss of ‘Englishness’” (31).

<sup>59</sup> Kumar goes on to suggest that Powell “believes that there [is] a longstanding national culture which has persisted – unchanged in its essentials – over centuries. This is the culture of ‘old English’ that he wishes to preserve against the threat of ‘swamping’ posed by large scale immigration, with its non-English ways; by the same token, it is this very antiquity and solidity that make it virtually impossible for any but very small numbers of non-English people to be integrated or assimilated into English culture” (267).

the already seething racist sentiment that had been brewing since the mid-1950s.<sup>60</sup> Mandler argues that Powell was making “his own half-conscious, half-desperate appeal to ‘national identity’ - a gut level sense of solidarity – in default to an old character that now seemed lost forever” (227). Powell, then, was associating the urban working-class struggle with a broader sense of national identity founded on racist and violent language. Such nationalist racism advocated by working-class identities is present, for example, in Ali’s novel in the form of pamphlets slid under council flat doors decrying the use of the common spaces on the estate for Muslim services. The idea that such sentiments creep through the smallest crevices into the space of the domestic suggests the penetrative scope of such divisive racism. Powell charged the white urban working-class individual with the responsibility of safeguarding English national identity.

Over the following twenty-five years, these perceived threats to national identity would be exacerbated by record high unemployment, increased immigration, and the pressures of Thatcherite deregulation and privatization. The easy response to such sociocultural and political pressures was to re-engage the “other” as a tactic for, following Colley, re-imagining a sense of Britishness through a definition of what it is not. As Gilroy suggests, “race (in specificity of its historical signifying) faces down, as it were, a ‘national’ or ‘imagined’ English community” (5).<sup>61</sup> In this sense, Powell not only appealed to local

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<sup>60</sup> As *The Observer* wrote in April 1968 in response to Powell’s speech and the marches that occurred after his dismissal from the shadow cabinet, “the early-warning signs of racial ill-feeling in Notting Hill, Nottingham and Smethwick were largely written off as local aberrations. Parliamentarians, the Press, radio, TV and the Churches all tended to minimize the underlying possibilities of racial tensions.”

<sup>61</sup> Another perspective of the decline of national identity is, as Jeremy Black argues, not only caught up in struggles of race relations, but also in the increasing influence of global capital. As the influx of big block chain stores like McDonalds and Asda became more prevalent, the look and significance of the High Street began to change drastically (17). Black agrees that the increasing popularity of Pizza Hut and curry takeaways subverted the more traditional fish and chip supper, and, in turn, part of the Orwellian English character: “these shifts in consumption reflected a widespread willingness to embrace change, and the

white working-class communities, but further made the connection between the health and tradition of such communities and the health and tradition of national identity. Nairn comments on this idea when he argues that

the arrival of nationalism in a distinctively modern sense was tied to the political baptism of the lower classes. Their entry into history furnished one essential precondition of the transformation of nationality into a central and formative factor. And this is why, although sometimes hostile to democracy, nationalist movements have been invariably populist in outlook and sought to induct lower classes into political life. In its most typical version, this assumed the shape of a restless middle-class and intellectual leadership trying to stir up and channel popular class energies into support for the new states. (41)

Powell's call to the working classes resulted in precisely such a populist "stir[ring] up," in which the language and ideas of racism were used to unite and mobilize the working classes against a commonly perceived threat to their culture and national identity. As Nairn, Hall, and Gilroy all argue in distinct ways, while Powell's feelings towards the perceived anarchy of immigrant populations in Britain may be seated in a desire for the preservation of English national identity, they are nonetheless dangerously racist. As Nairn points out, "in the obscene form of racism, English nationalism has been reborn" (269). Such "racism" was, as Nairn goes on to suggest, deeply rooted in the urban street:

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seductive impact of marketing and fashion" (18). While it is beyond the scope of this chapter, it would be fruitful to uncover the ways in which Asian cuisine was so readily taken up by English identities, yet the immigrants who introduced those dishes, as both Powell and Gilroy would agree, were not. Gilroy also argues a similar point when he says, "despite their obvious viciousness and political charge, today's racisms must not be allowed to mislead. Racial subordination is not the sole factor shaping the choices and actions of Britain's black settlers and their British-born children. The racial nationalist portrait of blacks as fundamentally alien must not be accorded too much power. It is only one theme in the antagonism which forms and disorganizes today's English working class" (153-154).

as Powell realized, it has become possible to define Englishness vis-à-vis this internal ‘enemy’, this ‘foreign body’ in our own streets. This is exactly what he tried to do in his speech of April 1968. It was more than a case of locating a new scapegoat: this scapegoat was to have the honour of restoring a popular content to English national self-consciousness, of stirring the English ‘corporate imagination’ into life once more, by providing a concrete way of focusing its vague but powerful sense of superiority. (274)

The “other” by which English identity had traditionally been defined was now, in the mid-1960s, to be found in “our own streets” and, as such, represented both a threat to traditional ideas of Englishness and a handy “scapegoat” for the ills of the nation. Powell thus reconstructed and relocated the chaotic “other” as invading the spaces of English identity. The “production of space,” in this regard, became deeply defined by racialized conflict.

Gilroy agrees with Nairn when he claims that Powell’s speech proposed an idea of immigration that included an inherent “anarchy represented by black settlement [...] counter-posed to an image of England in which Britannia is portrayed as an old white woman, trapped and alone in the inner city” (86). This antagonistic nationalism is born, Gilroy argues, out of the Powellite perception of immigration and multicultural communities as threats to white British national identity.<sup>62</sup> Further, Gilroy goes on to suggest that Powell’s (and later, Thatcher’s) use of such militaristic language as “alien,” “enemy” and “occupation” provides the rhetorical foundation for a colonial British national

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<sup>62</sup> In 1972 the mugging and murder of widower Mr. Arthur Hills near Waterloo Station raised the intensity of racism and division in England as it coalesced, for the popular media and Tory membership, the ideas of race and violent crime. In turn, this had an inevitable impact on just who the “enemy” was and, as such, just who the nation could unite and define themselves against. For a further account of this event and the ensuing media frenzy and social panic, see Hall, Critcher, et al.

identity that, as Nairn and Colley emphasize, was “forged above all by war” (Colley 5). As Gilroy argues, “alien cultures come to embody a threat which, in turn, invites the conclusion that national decline and weakness have been precipitated by the arrival of blacks” (46). Powell’s argument for “banishing blacks, repatriating them to the places which are congruent with their ethnicity and culture, becomes doubly desirable” and emerges as part of the “process of making Britain great again [by restoring] an ethnic symmetry to a world distorted by imperial adventure and migration” (46).

However, as it became clear during the 1970s and 80s that most of those who had come were not about to go back to their “home” countries, and as second generation immigrants essentially took on British identities, ideas and perceptions of race and class became increasingly coterminous.<sup>63</sup> While the miners and dockers marched in support of Powell’s proposed immigration policies in the late 1960s, by the 1970s and early 1980s it became clear just how closely linked class and race had become. As Gilroy observes, “miners and blacks discover[ed] that they share[d] being labeled the ‘enemy within’” (34). As the nation moved into the 1970s, massive civil strife and unrest – including the miners’ strike of 1973, the three-day work week, the rationing of electricity in 1974, out-of-control inflation, and the “winter of discontent” that saw massive trade union strikes during 1978-79 – made the prospect of a unified national identity increasingly unlikely, leading then

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<sup>63</sup> These second-generation ethnic identities are represented in texts such as Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* and Hanif Kureishi’s *Buddha of Suburbia* and *My Beautiful Launderette*. These identities are stuck in the peculiar position of not knowing exactly where home is, which is quite different from the often-nostalgic sentiments first-generation immigrants had of their homeland. This idea of home is investigated further in Kureishi’s “The Rainbow Sign,” where he recounts returning from Pakistan to England, where he was born: “So there was always going to be the necessary return to England. I came home... to my country. This is difficult to say. ‘My country’ isn’t a notion that comes easily. It is still difficult to answer the question, where do you come from? I have never wanted to identify with England” (99).

Prime Minister Edward Heath to ask in 1974: “Who governs Britain?” (Black 119).<sup>64</sup> The only way to become a participating citizen in the Thatcher era was not through Powell’s nostalgic notions of English working-class identities, but rather through an individual embrace of material wealth and ownership. Such an embrace, as we see represented in *Brick Lane*, seemed possible for English and immigrant identities alike.

During the 1980s, Thatcher worked hard to instill a sense of individual responsibility through ideas of free market economics and union busting. The backlash came when it became clear that the same working-class identities who had fought in the Falklands War were also often the ones adversely affected by Thatcherite policies of de-industrialization. The effort to abolish class in favour of individualism, an effort that continues into contemporary British politics through the use of the rhetoric of exclusion rather than disenfranchisement, thus began to take shape. Thatcher’s government was determined to popularize a kind of Victorian Englishness that would again define, in colonial terms, the British population against the “other,” while at the same time redefining citizenship through ownership and entrepreneurialism.

Building on the racist rhetoric used so effectively by Powell in the 1960s, Thatcher’s government institutionalized such racist sentiment through the Race Relations Act of

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<sup>64</sup> As Jeremy Black reports, “[i]n December 1973, faced by problems with the miners, who pushed their £138 million pay claim hard, the Heath government put industry on a three-day work week to conserve power supplies. Faced by power cuts, people had to check newspapers to find out when they would have electricity. The economy was anyway hard hit by quadrupling of oil prices that followed the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War... This was a stark reminder that, however ungovernable the domestic situation might be, the international one was even less subject to direction by government. By the end of his government, Heath was unable to wield or provide power” (Black 120). The result was the loss of government for the Conservatives and Callaghan’s win for the Labour party in 1974. However, as unemployment and strike actions increased, Callaghan lost the 1979 election to Thatcher’s Conservatives.

1981.<sup>65</sup> The act, passed through parliament in 1983, despatialized national identity for immigrants in a way that legitimized Powell's fears about the "dilution of Englishness." As Baucom declares:

[W]hereas through the entire preceding history of the British Empire, Britishness had been affirmatively grounded in a law of place, the 1981 Nationality Act codified a theory of identity that sought to defend the 'native' inhabitants of the island against the claims of their former subjects by defining Britishness as an inheritance of race.

(8)

The Act provides a significant ideological backdrop for diasporic literature, such as Ali's *Brick Lane*, set in 1980s Britain. Although Sandhu asserts that Ali's novel lacks a clear ideological framework because it fails to directly address Thatcherite politics and policies, Ali's text in fact engages with such politics and policies precisely *because* of the period in which it is set. While not directly referring to the way that the British Nationality Act legislated insecurity and fear about what the Tories increasingly referred to as a "dilution of Britishness," Ali's representation of what it meant to be British during the Thatcher period is nuanced not only by race, but also by the possibilities that individual entrepreneurial and financial success provided to immigrant identities.

One of the implications of Ali's novel is that while there was an undercurrent of racist fear that immigrant identities might "dilute ... Britishness," in the Powellite sense,

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<sup>65</sup> The Act redefined how *jus soli* was put into place with respect to British nationality. Before the act was legislated, any person born in Britain (with exceptions made in the case of children of diplomats and enemy aliens) was entitled to, and received, British Citizenship. After the Act came into law, it was required that at least one parent of a United Kingdom-born child be either a British citizen or at least "settled" in the United Kingdom as a permanent resident. The vast majority of children born in the United Kingdom, even after the act was enforced, still acquired British citizenship.

individual financial success during the Thatcher period was, in effect, a greater equalizer than race. Such a suggestion therefore redirects the signifier of the “enemy within” from those who are of a different racial background to those who are unemployed and state-reliant. In this way, as I mention in my previous chapter on *Trainspotting*, whiteness was also racialized for those who were unemployed, living on council estates, and on social benefits. In part, Gilroy agrees with Anderson’s “claims that racism is essentially antithetical to nationalism” because the kinds of communities that can be imagined through printed language and, in the case of Thatcher, financial success, are different than those imagined through “biological difference and kinship.” However, Ali’s text seems to trouble Gilroy’s notion that

whatever objections can be made to Anderson’s general argument, his privileging of the written word over the spoken word for example, it simply does not apply to the English/British case. The politics of ‘race’ in this country are fired by conceptions of national belonging and homogeneity, which not only blur the distinction between ‘race’ and nation, but also rely on that very ambiguity for their effect. Phrases such as ‘the Island Race’ and ‘the Bulldog Breed’ vividly convey the manner in which this nation is represented in terms which are simultaneously biological and cultural. (45)

While Ali does not specifically refer to the Race Relations Act, or the notion of “imagined community,” her representations of race, space, and individualism, deeply nestled amidst the political climate of the 1980s and 1990s, provide a representation of the ways in which some immigrant identities were able to move within the neoliberal spaces of the Thatcherite city. In this way, her text imagines how broad notions of assimilation and hybridity were at times subverted over the course of the 1980s by notions of entrepreneurialism and

individual struggle.

### ***Brick Lane, or How to Get Ahead in Tower Hamlets***

Ali's text interrogates notions of home, community, and identity as they are intimately tied to "dwelling spaces," what Procter defines as "basements and bedsits, streets and cafes, the suburbs and the city" (1). The Bangladeshi characters in Ali's text establish a sense of home and identity in and through the spaces in which they live and work: the Tower Hamlet estate (both the public spaces of the community hall/gardens and the private spaces of the council flats) and the street (Brick Lane). As Procter suggests, "to dwell is not necessarily to arrive or 'settle': dwelling is a spatial and temporal *process*, rather than a signifier of closure or resolution" (15). Ali's protagonist, Nazneen, a first-generation Bengali immigrant, challenges and eventually, subverts her expected role as a Muslim Bengali mother and wife within her domestic "dwelling space." As Baucom echoes Lefebvre, "identity *is* ... locale; ...we are the product of the spaces we inhabit" (38).

We discover that most of Nazneen's identity is formed in and through the "spatial and temporal *process*" of dwelling within her council flat and the surrounding urban spaces rather than nostalgic memories of the village where she was born. Nazneen's identity is not fixed through nostalgia (as it is for her husband, Chanu, and others in her community), but is rather problematically formed and constructed through an engagement with a neoliberal Britishness deeply rooted in the spaces in which she lives. Her sense of identity comes from the ways in which she establishes herself in relation to "the spaces [she] inhabit[s]," the wealth she is able to accumulate and, also the ways in which she establishes her sense of home.

Ali approaches the struggle over the notion of home and belonging through characters such as Chanu. Upon his arrival in London from Bangladesh, Chanu's expectations of England are deeply invested in Orwellian imperial notions of identity that Powell espoused as "true British identity" (Powell). Early in the novel, Chanu suggests that being able to "quote from Chaucer or Dickens or Hardy" should provide him with the necessary credentials for a promotion by his boss "Mr. Dalloway" (Ali 24). Thus, Chanu's understanding of English identity and belonging is built on nostalgic forms of fictional narrative rather than lived experience. Such nostalgic narrativization of identity is similar to that which Powell espoused in his *Rivers of Blood* speech. In this way, Ali confronts such constructions of identity as problematic because they are based on convenient re-workings of history that accommodate fictional representations of Englishness. As Baucom suggests, "remembrance, especially nostalgic remembrance, is regularly intimate with forgetting" (7).

The problem with forgetting, as Dr. Azad theorizes in the novel, is how it creates ideal conditions for what he calls "going home syndrome" (Ali 19). In reference to the Bengali community in and around Brick Lane, Dr. Azad suggests that "they don't ever really leave home. Their bodies are here but their hearts are back there. And anyway, look how they live: just recreating the villages here" (19). As Azad sees it, the notion of home for many of the Bengali immigrants living in Brick Lane is deeply tied to nostalgic ideas about Bangladesh in a way that fragments and disrupts their ability to form identities in and through the spaces of London. While Dr. Azad's claims are problematic because they gesture towards the kinds of self-imposed ghettoization that Powell warned would destroy English neighborhoods, Ali's novel confronts the issue through her representation of Nazneen's financially and socially successful integration with the broader British

population. In doing so, Nazneen rejects the nostalgia that Dr. Azad warns about in favour of a kind of British identity that disregards her own culture and traditions.

Nazneen's reflections on growing up in Bangladesh, and her comparison of those experiences with her current life in London, are significant aspects of her "processes of identity" (Hall). While others in her community suffering from "going home syndrome" idealize Bangladesh in comparison with London, Nazneen notes the differences between the places without imposing a significant value on either (Ali 19). As a child in Bangladesh, she "look[s] across the fields, glittering green and gold in the brief evening light"; after she arrives in London, she "look[s] out across the dead grass and broken paving stones to the block opposite" (Ali 6). These landscapes are drastically disparate, yet her observation of each is more about the process of "look[ing]" than what she is actually looking at.

Elsewhere, the comparisons are more nuanced and ambiguous, as when she claims: "you can spread your soul over a paddy field, you can whisper to a mango tree, you can feel the earth beneath your toes and know that this is the place, the place where it begins and ends. But what can you tell to a pile of bricks? The bricks will not be moved" (66). Though this example might be construed as a kind of pastoral nostalgia for the paddy fields and her ability to "spread out" and intimately relate to them in a way that she just cannot amidst "the bricks," Nazneen can equally be seen here as instead questioning the way in which she will be able to adapt to, and communicate with, the concrete urban environment. Nazneen is searching for, in some sense looking forward to, "what" she can tell the bricks, and, as such, yearning for the kind of language that will allow her to do so. Such looking forward, as Stuart Hall would agree, is key to the "production of identity":

another way of thinking of identity and the production of identity, is in terms of the story that people are able, and in certain situations have to, produce in order to give a popular historical account of who they are, where they came from, how they got into this fix. And usually, since history doesn't have to do with the past, but the future - where these people are going to end up and why. (Hall, "Politics of Identity" 131)

In this sense, Nazneen's narrative threads together the connections between space and time in relation to her "production of identity" as deeply rooted in what Hall calls a future history. Her isolation in the council flat and acceptance that "she could spend another day alone ...[i]t was only another day" (Ali 7) imply her understanding that the flows and rhythms of the space in which she lives pressure and influence her processes of identity: "she saw only flats, piles of people loaded one on top of the other, a vast dump of people rotting away under a mean strip of sky, too small to reflect all those souls" (303). Inasmuch as she recognizes the relationship between landscape and identity in Bangladesh, she also recognizes the sociospatial significance of the architecture and landscape of the tower block and those who live inside. Not hospitable, and certainly not bucolic compared to the village she grew up in, Nazneen's vision of the council estate is in some ways similar to the way that Welsh frames such spaces as decaying and full of the disenfranchised in *Trainspotting*. While Welsh's text, however, imagines a deep dialectal relationship between the dilapidation of such spaces and, for example, Tommy's decaying body, Ali's novel portrays Tower Hamlets as a space with positive avenues for identity formation that result because of, not necessarily in spite of, the decay of the surrounding space.

As Nazneen begins to recognize the spatial aspect of her council flat as stark, “dead” and “broken,” she also eventually becomes deeply acquainted with the boundaries of her space, and her relationship to those boundaries, through the echoes of her neighbours. As Lefebvre argues, “social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves on one another” (*Production* 86). In this sense, such echoes “interpenetrate” her process of dwelling, as Procter would propose, as she continues to form her identity within the spaces of her council flat:

what she missed was people. Not any people in particular (apart, of course, from Hasina) but just people. If she put her ear to the wall she could hear sounds. The television on. Coughing. Sometimes the lavatory flushing. Someone upstairs scraping a chair. A shouting match below. Everyone in their boxes, counting their possessions. In all her eighteen years she could scarcely remember a moment that she had spent alone. Until she married. And came to London to sit day after day in this large box with the furniture to dust, and the muffled sounds of private lives sealed away above, below, and around her. (Ali 12)

Nazneen’s initial experience in Tower Hamlets is a “private” life “sealed away” from her neighbours. They are close and yet distant. It is within her domestic space that she becomes aware of the compartmentalization of her life and her limited experience of others beyond Mrs. Islam, Razia, Chanu, Dr. Azad and the “muffled sounds” of her neighbours. In this way, Ali frames the beginning of Nazneen’s move toward becoming British through her socially isolated position as it lays the foundations for the kind of neoliberal capitalist endeavour that she eventually pursues.

The prison-like description of Nazneen's experience echoes some of the ways that Welsh imagines the abject condition of Tommy and his "varicose vein flat" as, both socially and physically, dialectically engaged in his identity-formation (Welsh 315):

She looked at the massive black shiny wardrobe and the gold zigzag design that you could pick off with a fingernail. She looked at the brown carpet, at the patch worn through to the webbed plastic that held it together. She looked at the ceiling light that lit up the dust on the shade and bent shadows across the walls. She looked at her stomach that hid her feet and forced her to lean back to counter its weight. She looked and she saw that she was trapped inside this body, inside this room, inside this flat, inside this concrete slab of entombed humanity. (Ali 56)

Similar to the way in which Tommy embodies Stallybrass and White's "abject male body in crisis" (80), Nazneen initially inhabits an abject subject-position as she endures a new-found isolation concomitant with her move to London. Her experience, as Sandhu reports, was common for many immigrant women who moved to London in the 1980s and 1990s and

found themselves being forced to work as hard as in the village they left behind. The only difference was that their living conditions were often far worse in London: cut off from grass or sea ... it's no surprise that many black women regarded their homes as little more than cattle pens. They were confined. (*London Calling* 133-134)

Nazneen eventually resents the "confine[ment]" that Sandhu mentions, and asks Chanu about the possibility of leaving the flat on her own. His response suggests the inherent

conflict of cultures: “I don’t stop you from doing anything. I am westernized now.” At the same time, he tells her that “if you were in Bangladesh you would not go out. Coming here you are not missing anything, only broadening your horizons” (Ali 30). While Tommy, in Welsh’s *Trainspotting*, remains trapped in his flat until he eventually succumbs to AIDS, Nazneen confronts her subject-position in a way that suggests, as Deleuze and Guattari might argue, a kind of “becoming” deeply engaged with the sounds and movement of the tower block.

For Deleuze and Guattari, “becoming is to emit particles that take on certain relations of movement and rest because they enter a particular zone of proximity. Or, it is to emit particles that enter that zone because they take on those relations” (273). Nazneen’s “ear to the wall” engagement with her living space, where she physically links up with the boundaries she shares with others, extends her process of identity formation as she listens to the sounds of televisions and flushing toilets coming from adjacent flats (Ali 12). Ali’s novel suggests that becoming part of a community is possible through walls and echoes: “they used to disturb her, these activities, sealed and boxed and unnerving. When she had come she had learned about loneliness, then about privacy, and finally she learned a new kind of community” (145).

Nazneen’s initial desire for community is accessed through her relatively naïve experiences with television. For Nazneen, the television is like a “fire in the corner of the room” as the “screen [holds] her” and, after watching the ice skating for the first time, prompts her to tell Chanu that she wants to learn “some English” (27). She does not say she wants to learn how to speak English, but rather “some English,” thus blurring the boundaries between language and culture. As Nazneen watches ice skating on television,

she is anesthetized to her daily isolation: “while she sat, she was no longer a collection of the hopes, random thoughts, petty anxieties, and selfish wants that made her, but was whole and pure. The old Nazneen was sublimated and the new Nazneen was filled with white light, glory” (27). These numbing qualities propel Nazneen’s isolation from her local community while at the same time implying a board “imagined community” (Anderson) of viewers and consumers.

The televised ice skating acts as an organizing force for her feelings by giving shape to the voices, “echoes,” and “muffled sounds” with which she has become acquainted through the walls of her flat. In this way, television functions as a transformative force for Nazneen, allowing her to become part of a broader audience from within her own home, the experience of watching television, simultaneously shared with millions of other people, slightly alleviating the isolation that she felt when she first moved to London.

As Rita Felski observes, “the everyday is seen to harbor inchoate impulses and unconscious desires that foreshadow an incandescent future of revolutionary upheaval” (609). In this sense, Nazneen’s engagement with the television – an “everyday” experience for most Britons – “fill[s] her with white light” and contributes to a cultural shift as she is “sublimated” by the gracefulness of the skating and the flashiness of the costumes. While Paul Virilio suggests that “live televised events” erase spatial boundaries in a way that enables “places [to] become interchangeable at will” (385), Ali represents a porousness, rather than an interchangeability, of the boundaries between the domestic and the public spheres in a way that provides Nazneen a sense of a peephole out of her isolation.

## **Nazneen as Urban/ Urban as Process**

During Nazneen's initial experience of the urban spaces surrounding her council flat, she follows a pace behind Chanu while he walks along Brick Lane. It is a corporeal experience full of industrial smells and noise: "there were more cars than people out here, a roaring metal army tearing up the town. A huge truck blocked her line of vision, petrol on her tongue, engines in her ears" (Ali 28). She imagines the cars as a "metal army tearing up the town," and the architecture as infinite in scope: "She looked up at a building as she passed. It was constructed almost entirely of glass, with a few thin rivets of steel holding it together... Nazneen craned her head back and saw that the glass above became dark as a night pond. The building was without end. Above, somewhere, it crushed the clouds" (39).

Nazneen's description of the struggle between the glass structure and the "crushed clouds" is analogous to Jameson's postmodern account of the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles as "the glass skin [that] achieves a peculiar and placeless disassociation from the surrounding structures" (243). As Jameson further describes, "it is not even an exterior, inasmuch as when you seek to look at the [...] outer walls you cannot see the [building] itself but only the distorted images of everything that surrounds it." Akin to the dystopic portrayal of the relationship between global capital, the city, and apocalyptic climate change in Martin Amis's *London Fields*, Ali represents the dominance of capitalist accumulation as bearing down not only on those occupying the street below, but the surrounding environment as well. Nazneen's observation is, as Bhabha describes, "where the negotiations of incommensurable differences creat[e] a tension peculiar to borderline existences" (312). Nazneen thus realizes that there are "incommensurable differences" between her life in Bangladesh and her life in London inasmuch as there are

“incommensurable differences” between her working-class existence in the Tower Hamlets and the glass structures of capital that loom over the London streets.

As she eventually ventures alone into the city, Nazneen’s experiences of the urban spaces of Brick Lane become less fear-laden and the labyrinthine urban narrative that she seeks out contributes to her identity formation within the city:

she took every second right and every second left until she realized that she was leaving herself a trail. Then she turned off at random, began to run, limped for a while to save her ankle, and thought she had come back in a circle. The buildings seemed familiar. She sensed rather than saw, because she had taken care not to notice. But now she slowed down and looked around her. (39)

The way that Nazneen begins to inscribe her identity as she walks through the East End streets echoes de Certeau’s theory that narratives are written and rewritten by walking through the city. As Angela Poon suggests, “walking in the city becomes a trope for learning one’s place in the world. Nazneen learns in ways which involve risk and openness, as well as unlearning; in this way, knowledge is relativized rather than presented as concrete truth and absolute certainty” (430).

Nazneen is thus the diasporic postmodern *flâneuse* who, rather than moving through the city as observer, loses herself, and ultimately the social ties to her Bengali community, in it. Eventually, she engages someone in the crowd: “she had spoken, in English, to a stranger, and she had been understood and acknowledged. It was very little. But it was something” (Ali 43). The moment of communicating with a stranger, in English, on an unfamiliar street in East London is, as Michael Perfect suggests, evidence that *Brick Lane* is a kind of “multicultural bildungsroman” (12). Nazneen is only able to locate herself in

London, and in a sense “discover” herself (Poon), once she relies on her own abilities to communicate in English to someone outside of her Bangladeshi community. Her emerging Britishness is therefore born of a dialectical engagement between identity, language, and space that is deeply and, as Ali eventually demonstrates, problematically reliant on a specific kind of Thatcherite individualism. As Baucom argues,

‘English’ spaces ... emerge as increasingly complex sites in the imperial dialectic of Englishness ... they exist not only as determining but as determined cultural locations, as spaces of memory that alter the identities of the persons inhabiting, viewing, or passing through them, and that simultaneously suffer a sea change as wave after wave of the empire’s subjects wash over them. (195)

Nazneen encounters Lefebvre’s “transformation of space” when her social position shifts as she communicates with a stranger in English and thus “find[s]” herself in the city.

Nazneen comes to understand that there is a kind of anonymity possible in the city: “every person that brushed past her on the pavement, every back she saw, was on a private, urgent mission to execute a precise and demanding plan” (39). Nazneen’s walking in the city, her being “on the pavement,” provides her with first-hand experience of the kinds of neoliberal patterns that are played out as “private, urgent missions” across the spaces of the metropolis. Since, as Procter argues, “specific modes of travel ... - walking in the street, commuting to the suburbs, travelling in the country - are in themselves markers of dwelling” (15), her movement through the spaces of the city contribute to her growing sense that the city is indeed included in her own “dwelling space.” Procter further asserts that

as a site of peripatetic excess, the street offers a particularly compelling chronotope when translated into the travelling poetics of diaspora discourse. Itself a metaphor for ‘wandering, mobility, arrival, and departure’ the street would appear the *locus classicus* for an exploration of the migrant condition. (76)

Wandering, getting lost, and then finding oneself in the city is, as Procter suggests, deeply rooted in the “migrant tradition” of discovery. As Nazneen walks through, and inscribes herself on, the city, her domestic space is also transformed through small acts of rebellion that she employs to test her newly acquired independence. These small rebellious acts include not telling Chanu of her experiences outside the flat, adding extra chilies in his food, and folding dirty laundry away in the drawers. Though they seem innocuous in isolation, these seemingly banal acts are hallmarks of Nazneen’s attempt to navigate and control her social identity within her domestic space. Her urban wanderings encourage her to reconsider the value of her domestic labour in a way that leads to a broader sense of “becoming” British.

Nazneen’s process of identity formation is deeply affected by “the spatial organization of production and the transformation of time-space relations; movements of information, [and] geopolitical conflicts between territorially-based class alliances” (Harvey, *Urban* 7). Ali does not, as Rehana Ahmed suggests, foreground Nazneen’s “individual liberation from community oppression and her journey into the neutral space of an ‘inclusive’ multicultural Britain” (25), but rather portrays Nazneen’s becoming British as anything but neutral. Nazneen’s initial understanding of herself is in relation to the oppositional “other.” Her self-awareness is gleaned in comparison with how she sees herself in relief to the people, buildings, and landscapes she encounters: “Nazneen,

hobbling and halting, began to be aware of herself. Without a coat, without a suit, without a white face, without a destination. A leaf-shake of fear - or was it excitement? - passed through her legs” (40). The excitement of being “without a white face” and a wanderer “without a destination” suggests a kind of tabula rasa she comes to believe in as she starts to be “aware of herself” in relation to the spatiality of what David Harvey calls the “processes of capital circulation” (*Urban* 7).

As she finds herself lost in the city, Nazneen thinks: “but how could she go home? That was the point of being lost. She, like Hasina, could not simply go home. They were both lost in cities that would not pause even to shrug” (42). Nazneen’s “journey” (Ahmed), then, is not based on a nostalgic notion of home, but rather a new consideration of what home might mean. She begins, as Stuart Hall would agree, to write a personal, and therefore local, history that moves beyond the cultural constraints of English and Bengali to something more fragmented and neoliberal in nature.

### **Conclusion: Domestic Production, or the Production of Home**

As Nazneen composes her pedestrian narrative during her walks through the East End of London, she eventually answers the question of how she will talk to the “bricks” of the city: she learns to navigate the streets, speak English, and eventually earn her own money. Through her accumulation of wealth and independence, then, she gains access to more and more space and, as a result, access to what Hall would call different processes of identity formation. However, Ali foregrounds the significance of citizenship and entrepreneurialism as Nazneen’s labour and the surplus value she realizes through her work as a seamstress lead to a sense of increasing freedom and access to space. Such labour and surplus value, however, implies not only a distancing from her sociocultural community,

but also a different kind of imprisonment based on her sense of Britishness as deeply reliant on her ability to accumulate wealth.

The job as a seamstress that Nazneen takes on to make some extra money in support of Chanu's plans to return them to Bangladesh leads her to consider her subject position in terms of labour value within her community and, more specifically, the spaces in which she lives and works. She ultimately imagines her contribution to the mode of production and economic exchange as an opportunity to take over her domestic space through her adulterous relationship with Karim. She leverages her domestic labour value from a role of domestic and cultural subservience to a role that generates surplus value and, in turn, provides her a space within the broader capitalist mode of production and exchange. Such leveraging, however, ultimately leaves her with a much smaller community made up of Razia, Razia's kids, and her own kids.

While Kabeer and Ahmed argue that Nazneen's role as a "female garment worker ... in London's poorest borough" contributes to "a culturalist attitude" that promotes patriarchal stereotypes (32), I argue that Ali's novel repositions such cultural stereotypes in a way that works to uncover the deeply problematic Thatcherite desire to access citizenship and British identity through wealth accumulation and labour in the private sector. Further, the marital distance that grows between Nazneen and Chanu arises not just because they are mismatched, or because Nazneen has an affair, but rather because they each begin to represent different, and arguably incompatible, aspects of British identity.

Chanu's shift from working on the council to being unemployed is allied with his shift from a desire for nostalgic English national identity to longing for a nostalgic Bengali identity. At the same time, Nazneen pushes past her domestic and cultural role within her

marriage and the Bengali community as she takes on a more Thatcherite, British, multicultural identity formed through television broadcasts, her experiences of walking through the city, and her role in the capitalist mode of production. Significantly, the clothes that she begins to repair are not saris and burkhas, but more typical Western clothes such as miniskirts. Inasmuch as Razia's Union Jack sweater represents her desire to become British, the kind of clothing Nazneen spends time mending contributes to her continued process of "becoming" British. While Chanu believes in a heritage-style Englishness not unlike the one Powell so desperately tried to preserve, Nazneen sees English heritage as a novelty, something to be visited:

a cracked mug bearing a picture of a thatch-roofed cottage and a mouse in trousers leaning on the gatepost. It was a picture of England. Roses around the door.

Nazneen had never seen this England but now, idly, the idea formed that she would visit it. (Ali 367)

In this sense, Nazneen subverts and theme-parks the kind of Powellite English identity that Chanu desires. In turn, she reacts and engages with the spaces of Brick Lane in a way that creates an opportunity for a new kind of identity formation that, on the surface, appears to fit within the Thatcherite neoliberal push for independent wealth and entrepreneurialism.

Such Thatcherite independence is, however, problematic. Ali's novel, much like contemporary British Tory politics, leaves out the notion of class almost entirely. Perhaps another way that Ali rejects the Powellite notion of English identity is by not portraying Nazneen or those in her immediate community as working-class, though their socioeconomic situation would imply otherwise. Much like Thatcher's party line, the implication is that neoliberal individualism somehow replaces the need for class

identification. We might suspect, in fact, that the Tory campaign slogan “He’s Not Black, He’s British” runs just under the surface of characters such as Razia and her ubiquitous union jack sweatshirt. In this way, Ali portrays Nazneen as taking up the Thatcherite neoliberal dream of individualism and entrepreneurialism in a rather problematic way.

Nazneen feels that

if she changed her clothes her entire life would change. If she wore a skirt and a jacket and a pair of high heels, then what else would she do but walk around the glass palaces on Bishopsgate and talk into a slim phone and eat lunch out of a paper bag? If she wore trousers and underwear, like the girl with the big camera on Brick Lane, then she would roam the streets fearless and proud. And if she had a tiny, tiny skirt with knickers to match and a tight bright top, then she would - how could she not? - skate through life with a sparkling smile and a handsome man who took her hand and made her spin, spin, spin. (Ali 228)

Nazneen thus links up Westernized clothing as it appears in the streets of London with notions of individual pride, opportunity, and success.

The conflict between racist notions of immigrant identities and Ali’s version of British identity is dependent on the dialectics of space and identity. The struggle over urban space and English identity has flared up over the decades between Powell’s famous “Rivers of Blood” speech and the Thatcher period that begins Ali’s novel, as evidenced in, for example, the Brixton Riots and the Race Relations Acts of the 1980s, and the riots across Britain in 2011. As Nazneen moves into the flat in London, she goes through a change *because* of the space she lives in and, in turn, we see that those same spaces change as a result of figures such as Nazneen living in them – either through their impact on those

spaces or the community reaction to their occupation of those spaces. The significance of the shift that Nazneen undergoes is twofold: she gains a Thatcherite sense of Britishness through her involvement in the capitalist mode of production and, as a result, a new kind of Bengali female identity that provides her with a way out of the nostalgia-driven patriarchy she struggles with throughout the novel. Therefore, she finds a sense of home that is not reliant on a nostalgic sense of England or Bangladesh, but rather a kind of financial, Thatcherite independence found through her mode of production. While the Bengali community initially protested Ali's novel as promoting negative stereotypes of immigrants from Bangladesh, the trouble with Ali's novel arises from the way in which she simplifies the struggle between race, class, and space by implying that Nazneen is able to find independence and freedom through her engagement with the accumulation of capital and the essential desertion of her ethnicity. The notion of race seems all but erased at the end of the novel, and one is left wondering if Nazneen is portrayed as no longer Bengali, but British, as the Tory slogan goes.

While on the surface it seems that Nazneen is able to quickly adjust to her newfound "Britishness," Ali troubles the ease of Nazneen's shift by suggesting that she is merely enacting a continuation of the imagined national identity she fantasized about when she watched televised ice-skating in her council flat. The final scene of the novel, with Nazneen and Razia preparing to step onto the ice rink, portrays the tension between Nazneen's hopefulness and the impossibility of her subject position as a self-employed working-class Bengali woman living in post-Thatcher London. As she looks out onto the ice, she thinks: "to get on the ice physically – it hardly seemed to matter. In her mind she was already there" (Ali 415). She acknowledges, then, that she does not need to actually skate, but

rather only imagine what that skating might be like. In this sense , too, there is loss, as she confronts the reality of ice-skating in comparison with the fantasy that she had earlier created within her council flat. The skaters she sees at the rink wear “no sequins, no short skirts” but rather “wore jeans” and “raced on, on two legs” (415). At stake in Ali’s representation of Nazneen’s increasingly hybrid identity is an inherent sense of loss as Nazneen continues to give up, or perhaps trade off, her ideas about cultural and ethnic ties in favour of an identity that is always rooted in fantasy.

Nazneen’s self-fashioning in opposition to the Bengali community, in a way that imagines them as “other” in much the same way as she will always be “other” to the English community, gestures towards the darker implications of Ali’s novel. While on the surface it might appear that Ali celebrates Nazneen’s ability to adapt and work toward a sense of becoming British and financially self-sufficient, the running undercurrent in *Brick Lane* is that as Nazneen pursues such Thatcherite independence, she risks positioning herself on the periphery of her cultural community, sacrificing her historical identity in favour of a sense of Britishness deeply reliant on Thatcherite notions of wealth accumulation and consumerism.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Let's Dance: Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* and the Spatialization of Thatcher**

*I feel terribly guilty I am not wearing blue, but I am going to the television studios and the background is bright turquoise, so I have to wear brown. We girls must think of these things.*

(Margaret Thatcher qtd. in Ogden 342)

*That, for instance, we do not have our beings and then go out and interact, but that to a disputed but none-the-less significant extent our beings, our identities, are constituted in and through those engagements, those practices of interaction. (Massey "Geographies of Responsibility" 5)*

*Space in itself may be primordially given, but the organization, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience. (Soja 79-80)*

In the previous chapter I examined the problematic notion in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* of *becoming* British, in the Thatcherite sense, through the transformation of Nazneen's domestic space from council-supported prison to a space of commercial production. In this chapter I turn to Alan Hollinghurst's Booker Prize-winning novel *The Line of Beauty* (2004) as it links together, and troubles, the varied representations of space, consumption, and identity that I have focused on throughout my analysis of Thatcherite urban spaces. In addressing how Hollinghurst's novel reveals the contradictory nature of Thatcherite urban space, I shall focus on his representation of the Lloyd's Building in London and of his character MP Gerald Fedden's domestic spaces in a way that illustrates the complexities of Stuart Hall's processes of identity as they are formed in and through the spaces of capital. Further, Hollinghurst's representation of the figure of Thatcher as an object to be consumed provides a kind of foil to figures such as Tommy in *Trainspotting*, who ends up cast aside

by the exclusive consumerism of Thatcherism, or Chanu in *Brick Lane*, who is eventually driven out of England by his own nostalgic constructions of English identity. What becomes clear in Hollinghurst's text is that the figure of Thatcher herself is *also* caught up in the very consumptive nationalism that Sinclair castigates; as a result, the way in which she is popularly understood and consumed is deeply tied to such notions.

Initially, this chapter investigates Hollinghurst's representation of the internal space of the Lloyd's Building: a space of international commerce that became a hallmark of Thatcherite deregulation. As the character Nick Guest, the eternal outsider, assesses his subject position and sense of identity (always loosely rooted in a Jamesian nostalgia) in relation to the space of postmodern global capital, Hollinghurst's text provides a kind of spatialized dialectical context for notions of nostalgia, access to space, and the intensities of social class as they contribute to what Hall calls the process of identity formation ("Old and New" 47). I then move on to examine Hollinghurst's portrayal of Gerald Fedden's domestic space as it blurs the boundaries between the public and private. Similarly to how Welsh represents Renton's experience in the publicly private domestic spaces of a council estate, Hollinghurst illustrates the domestic as "unknown" and "unfamiliar" through Thatcher's self-conscious and unstable subject position within the Feddens' home. Hollinghurst's representation of the figure of Thatcher at the Feddens' party reveals the way in which fragmented images of her body became cultural signifiers of "lust," "greed," and "power" and, thus, how contemporary British domestic spaces are deeply elided with notions of consumption and production. Such representations and fragmentations of the figure of Thatcher are, as Heather Nunn would argue, deeply rooted in many popular imaginings of the Prime Minister during and after the 1980s.

## Thatcher as Puppet, or the Puppetry of Thatcher

In 1984, soon after the general election that secured Margaret Thatcher a second term in office, the British television show *Spitting Image* aired publicly for the first time. The program gained immense success during the 1980s in its satirical approach to popular and political figures of the decade. Out of all the caricatures that were created, the Margaret Thatcher puppet became the most recognizable. The Thatcher puppet most often wore a men's suit and sported Thatcher's unmistakable coiffed hair, her unforgettable voice, and the piercing blue eyes that those around her both feared and revered. The *Spitting Image* puppet portrays Thatcher as a harsh, uncompromising, and bellicose figure whose clothing and style embody the excesses of power, politics, and consumption that became hallmarks of the 1980s. The puppet manipulates our ideas about gender expectations, imagining Thatcher's gendered identity as free-floating and fluid in a way that challenges Marjory Garber's theory of a figure in drag as represented through an "over determination" of gender (16).

While traditional (i.e. straight) approaches to Thatcher's gender position her as *fragmented* or *drag*, the *Spitting Image* puppet blurs these distinctions in a way that illustrates, and essentially spotlights, the free-floating nature of Thatcher's gender. The focal points of the Thatcher puppet become either its severe red lipstick or its cultivated lower, more masculine voice, purposely drawing our attention to the alternating ways in which her gender is performed. While the puppet engages Garber's "over determination" of gender through its intense lipstick and voice, it also makes *straight* the overlap of gender (i.e. man dressed as woman, or woman dressed as man) intrinsic to drag costumes by making Thatcher's identity more fluid than homosexual or drag identities.

In this sense, such representations make apparent Butler's theory of gender performance as Thatcher's body comes to stand for "fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs" of her socioeconomic policies (Butler 173). Thatcher's body, in this way, is sociospatially produced (similar to Lefebvre's notion of the "social production of space") through our expectations of gender and the ways that gender might be imagined and understood. The *Spitting Image* puppet thus *outs*, or makes external, the kinds of "gender trouble" (Butler) that often caused representations of Thatcher's body to be fragmented in order for it to make cultural sense to a nation that had never encountered such a politically gendered figure. As Soja argues, "the organization, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience" (79-80). As such, popular representations of Thatcher's body became spatialized in order for it to be "translated," made marketable and, as a result, sociopolitically understood.

As Thatcher oscillated between gendered roles as she adapted to various personas as the PM, the symbolic nature of her body became integral to public interpretation of her as a political figure. The problem was not that she was a woman trying to be a man, but rather that she was feminine and masculine *at the same time*. The way in which the *Spitting Image* puppet moves between masculine and feminine representations of Thatcher wrestles with such fragmentation and oscillation as it not only draws attention to the way that Thatcher was self-figured through, for example, speech therapy and her choice of clothing (both of which the *Spitting Image* puppet satirically features), but also to the ways in which those around her reacted to such self-figuring with a mixture of fear, reverence, and loathing. Parceling out these gendered fragments through the *Spitting Image* puppet in turn spotlights the way that English culture remained suspicious of a woman taking on the traditionally

masculine role of Prime Minister, not to mention such a figure occupying the traditionally masculine spaces of Parliament.

As Doreen Massey suggests, “thinking space relationally ... [has of] course been bound up with a wider set of reconceptualisations. In particular it has been bound up with a significant refiguring of the nature of identity” (5). As a result, Thatcher’s role as Prime Minister not only created a gender crisis within the cabinet, but also called into question the ways in which an intensely public political figure could so seamlessly float between gendered roles, and how such movement implies a kind of fragmenting, and in this sense “gender troubl[ing],” of the role of the Prime Minister (Butler). The role of the PM, then, was spatialized, and “reconceptualised,” in a way that troubled popular conceptions of what kind of identities were suited for the role. What becomes clear through the *Spitting Image* representation of Thatcher is that issues of gender (and often sexual orientation) are spatially played out in terms of social expectation, access to space, and the way that individual identity forms as a result. For Hollinghurst, the shift between the representation of Thatcher as a deeply, yet problematically, gendered and coveted body is not dissimilar to the way in which the clandestine figure of the gay drug-addicted aesthete, Nick Guest, is represented in *The Line of Beauty*.

*The Line of Beauty* adapts and confronts the representational politics of the *Spitting Image* puppet in a way that unseats the “gender trouble” and replaces it with an arguably problematic representation of the sexualized and coveted woman within an unfamiliar domestic space. Much like the recent film *Iron Lady* (2012) that portrays Thatcher as imprisoned by her dementia in her well-cared-for Kensington flat, Hollinghurst takes Thatcher out of the spaces of Parliament and reduces her interaction with the men around

her to furtive glances across the dance floor. With this in mind, I argue that Hollinghurst's novel provides a portrayal of Thatcher that embodies the consumer-driven economic and privatizing policies of 1980s Britain through its representation and spatialization of parts of Thatcher's body (for example, her eyes, her hair, her mouth, and her clothing) coveted by the men (mostly MPs) who surround her.

Hollinghurst thus also critiques problematic, and often reductive, representations of gay and transgendered identities in 1980s Conservative Britain by portraying the gay drug-addicted aesthete Nick Guest as the only male figure able to synthesize the fragments of the Thatcherite body through an intimate interaction with her on the dance floor. Further, Nick's references to Henry James throughout the novel are wrapped up in his desire for a sense of Englishness that is not unlike, as I discuss in my first chapter, the nostalgic renderings of National Heritage during the 1980s. For Guest, the aesthetics of architecture and the values contained therein are elided with identity formation and, as I argue in my discussion of the Lloyd's building, gesture to the dichotomy between inclusivity and exclusivity and, more broadly, the public and the private. Such intersections of nostalgic desire between Nick Guest and the figure of Thatcher challenge the deeply homophobic legislation carried out throughout the 1980s. In this sense, Hollinghurst portrays Thatcher as complicit in the identity formation of Guest through their intimate engagement in the domestic spaces of the Feddens' party and the subsequent publicness of their interaction as it is represented in the tabloids. Thatcher is thus ironically re-imagined as sympathetic, perhaps even attracted, to the kinds of identities that such legislation sought to marginalize, perhaps because of the way that she occupies a similarly complicated gendered social space to Guest.

*The Line of Beauty*, the first ‘gay’ novel ever to win the Booker Prize, traces the experiences of Nick Guest, a young, gay, aspiring academic who, after moving into the Kensington Gardens house of his college friend Toby Fedden, is taken up with the consumerist and consumptive aura of Thatcher’s London. The sense of hero-worship of, and often fearful reverence for, the figure of Thatcher permeates the novel – particularly in the case of Toby's father, MP Gerald Fedden, whose idea of political accomplishment includes simply meeting the PM and “the accolade of a *Spitting Image* puppet in his likeness” (Hollinghurst 361). While Hollinghurst’s previous works, notably *The Swimming Pool Library* (1988) and *The Folding Star* (1994), had focused on pre-AIDS gay life in London, *The Line of Beauty* folds homosexuality, AIDS, and drug abuse into the Conservative Thatcherite lifestyle of the 1980s upper classes in a way that makes ironic bedfellows of ‘deviant’ desire, consumption, and Thatcherite Conservatism.<sup>66</sup> While Thatcher left office in 1990, Hollinghurst’s work returned to 1980s London in both *The Folding Star* and *The Line of Beauty*, as Tony Blair brought the Labour majority closer in line with the Right than ever before. The setbacks that the gay community suffered in the mid-1980s remained largely intact throughout Blair’s term, and for writers such as Hollinghurst the defeat of the ideals of the Left became ever more poignant as Thatcherism continued to haunt contemporary social policy throughout the 1990s. Arguably, it is this poignancy that leads Hollinghurst to address traditional conceptions of Thatcher in an attempt to rework, and rewrite, Thatcher’s engagement with, and impact upon, the gay community during the 1980s and beyond.

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<sup>66</sup> *The Swimming Pool Library* came out in the same year that Thatcher’s government enacted Section 28 to prohibit local authorities from funding anything that might promote, or at the very least condone, homosexuality.

While much of Hollinghurst's novel refers to the revenant figure of the Prime Minister, the singular physical appearance of Thatcher in the text, at the Feddens' anniversary party, points to 1980s British flirtatious, and often adulterous, engagement with ideas of consumption and ownership in a way that articulates the signifying body of Thatcher as the ultimate 1980s sociopolitical commodity. The process each of the MPs goes through in coveting Thatcher is affected by various discourses of inclusion/exclusion and private/public. In wrestling with these issues, Hollinghurst draws on the sociopolitical context of the 1980s, exploring how the politics of inclusion and exclusion affected Thatcherite ideas about consumption and wealth, and private and public space. In this sense, Hollinghurst's text illustrates the way that the specter of Thatcher haunts 1980s British bourgeois society as she is coveted both socially and politically, and how some twenty years later she continues to beleaguer British society through issues of deregulation, public and private space, immigration, and gay rights.

### **Public and Private Shifts: Section 28, Thatcher, and the 1980s**

The 1980s was a period of significant social upheaval in Great Britain as Thatcher's government left few stones unturned in the drive to prop up the failing British economy. Such propping up included a determined shift towards an American style free-market economy through the turning over of publicly-owned industry to private enterprise, and social housing to private ownership. Such drastic sociopolitical changes, as I have discussed in the preceding three chapters, significantly altered the ways in which Britons were able to identify themselves as British subjects during the 1980s.

While many people on the Right have celebrated Thatcher's determination to free up the economic market through privatization, other critics have accused Thatcherite

policies of creating exclusive economic opportunity for wealthy individuals and the upper middle classes at the expense of marginalized identities, including gay men and women, the unemployed working class, immigrants, and what would come to be problematically known by many on the right as the new underclass. As John Corner and Sylvia Harvey suggest, there was a distinct contrast between unemployed working-class families “struggling to make ends meet” and upper-class wealthy individuals who were “benefitting from the purchase of council houses or the purchase (and often swift resale) of shares in some of the major and previously nationalized industries” (4). Thatcher’s decision to divorce the state from a socialist network broadened the gap between the wealthy and the poor and left the former with private ownership of, and investment in, previously public industries and properties that had contributed to the fabric of British society.

The politics of privatization brought about stringent forms of inclusion and exclusion that, as critics such as Stuart Hall, Robert Hewison, Raphael Samuel, and others have argued, changed the way that the individual citizen was identified as a contributing member of society. Owning shares in public-turned-private industries that still held the national name implied an economic shift in who could, and who could not, own a stake in industries that had previously been a mainstay of the British economy and British identity. The move towards private ownership as the previously state-owned industries were sold off to private investors also signaled a kind of consumption of national identity. In *The Line of Beauty*, such investors are drawn mainly from members of the upper-class Conservative Right who, like Hollinghurst’s MP Gerald Fedden and his cohort, desire to possess the nation through property ownership and political dominance. Those who could afford to

possess pieces of the national infrastructure could, in effect, control those citizens who were less financially secure.

Ideas of public and private ownership and, in turn, public and private spaces and access to those spaces became part of the “lust,” “greed,” and “power” that Heather Nunn links to the figure of Thatcher during the 1980s (172). In her study of Thatcher, fantasy, and gender, Nunn approaches the myth of Thatcher as a sociocultural signifier for the 1980s. Discussing Peter York’s six-part BBC series *80’s* that aired in January of 1996, she writes:

Thatcher appeared as a signifier of the decade - rarely a whole image - but a flash of blue cloth, a harsh close up of her mouth or as a waxwork image in Madam Tussauds. She appeared as an emblem of the excesses of the decade: power, lust, greed, heady success, self-indulgence, [and] egotism. (172)

Nunn draws attention to the way that Thatcher’s fragmented body became symbolic of a new kind of consumerism and national identity borne of Thatcherite neoliberal and privatizing policies. As Thatcherite policies moved towards an American style free-market economy, fragmented representations of Thatcher (her hair, her handbag, her clothing, etc.), appearing in such popular media venues as *Spitting Image*, became recognizable as symbols of her neoliberal promises of private investment and ownership that tipped the scales of “greed” and “heady success” in favour of the wealthy upper classes at the expense of those who relied on state support and union organization to survive. As the *Spitting Image* puppet spoofs, Thatcher’s neoliberal economic policies were elided with specifically gendered representations of a black suit, a cigar, and brash tone that, juxtaposed to her coiffed hair and dark lipstick, call into question traditional ideas of gender identity.

Such shifts in public and private ownership also changed the type of access individuals had to spaces within British cities, and what kinds of identities could be formed within those spaces. Bianchini and Schwengel highlight that

in the course of the 1980s the distinction between public and private space became less and less clear, with the emergence of “private public spaces”: that is, privately owned and managed spaces offered for public use. The proliferation of this kind of space was in some cases presented as an extension of public space, and therefore [purportedly offered] opportunities for public sociability and for the development of local citizenship and identity. (220)

As Bianchini and Schwengel suggest, the “extension of public space” was ostensibly the private masquerading as “public space.”<sup>67</sup> Interaction between individuals became increasingly rooted in consumerism and private investment as the commons were replaced by shopping malls and other consumer-focused spaces under the apparent purpose of providing “public space.” This idea of public private space, and the policing of those spaces, is confronted in Hollinghurst’s text when, for example, Nick Guest engages in illicit homosexual encounters within the private gardens behind the Feddens’ house. When a neighbour discovers Nick with his lover Leo (a black, working-class, gay man) just after such an encounter, Nick is forced to reveal his position as an “insider” with the key to the gardens, thus responding to a kind of suspicious surveillance that permeates the public private spaces to which Bianchini and Schwengel draw attention. At the same time, Nick’s

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<sup>67</sup> Such a masquerade is arguably similar to the kind of gendered masquerade Thatcher enacted in the way that it links up ideas of class, identity, and social policy.

position as an outsider, a “guest” in the gardens as it were, is exposed once he reveals his relationship to the Feddens. As Daniel Hannah aptly points out, “the gay observer is retained as the perfect guest, the refined observer, in the heteronormative house of capitalist acquisition so long as evidence of his sexuality is reduced to pure aesthetic taste, so long as bodily signs of his gayness remain private, invisible” (85). While Nick explains his relationship to the Feddens and his subsequent permission to be in the gardens, he does not disclose the nature of his visit there or his relationship to Leo for fear of disrupting his comfortable place within the “heteronormative house of capitalist acquisition.”

The way in which Nick is continuously figured as the “guest” “calls into question [Nick's] place ... as the invited other,” and as such, the novel “points to the gay citizen’s status within the nation-state as the ever-invited yet excluded ‘guest’ of both the conjugal family and the family’s institutional extension, the state” (85). Nick is thus only ever temporarily included into the spaces of exclusion, and is forever policed while he exists within those private spaces. While Nick’s intimate relationships with, for example, Wani Ouradi and Catherine Fedden in some sense provide him with a special vantage point from which to observe the contradictions inherent to the Thatcherite Conservative upper class, Nick’s inability to fully assimilate into the aristocratic lifestyle because of his sexuality functions as a reminder of the highly problematic Thatcherite policies of exclusion of homosexuality from publicly funded programs.

As “the development of local citizenship and identity” became progressively tied to private enterprise, marginalized populations such as the working classes, immigrant populations, and gay identities were imagined as a different type of citizen, in a way always a guest, distinct from the individual who could afford to move freely within private,

commercialized spaces such as shopping malls. As private industry began to participate in the very concept of public space, ideas of citizenship historically rooted in public spaces became privatized as well. Thatcher's shift away from socialism changed not only the industries and spaces that had been state run, but also suggested a shift toward an increasingly privatized British identity. In keeping with Thatcherite economic ideals, the raising up and commodification of historical "Englishness" was concomitant with the revitalization of a national identity and economic stability that no longer relied on socialist economics or national industry, but rather championed and celebrated neoliberal ideas of material wealth and upward mobility. As Hall points out, "the numbers of people who are not" part of the kind of English identity that Thatcherism prescribed included not only those who were racially excluded, but also large numbers of those who were excluded based on their economic, ethnic, or sexual identities ("Whose Heritage?" 26). Such sentiments of exclusion were widespread throughout the Conservative party during the 1980s: in an April 1988 speech, for example, Home Secretary Douglas Hurd advised that "material prosperity is the very precondition of the existence of active citizenship" (qtd. in Schwengel 223).

The implications of race, homosexuality, and wealth are drawn out in *The Line of Beauty* most clearly through the character of Wani Ouradi, the son of an immigrant Lebanese grocery store magnate, in a way that demonstrates the tension between individual identity (sexual and racial) and the more general Conservative desire to attain both economic and cultural capital. As I argue in Chapter Three, in *Brick Lane*, Monica Ali also imagines the kinds of opportunities possible for immigrants willing to take on a hybrid British identity built on the tacit acceptance of Thatcherite principles. To some extent, we may even directly compare Nazneen and Wani, in that in each case, a willingness to

participate in the Thatcherite economy at least partly forgives their sexual indiscretions. Though Hollinghurst troubles Thatcher's promotion of individual citizenship based on material wealth through his depiction of Wani's intense addictions to drugs and promiscuous gay sex and his eventual demise from AIDS, Wani nevertheless embodies the immigrant identity that has taken up the Thatcherite desire for personal wealth, allowing him to become part of the Conservative upper classes in a way that Nick never can.

Material wealth (and a discreet blind eye from others to his homosexuality) thus allows Wani and his family to overcome the kinds of ethnic roadblocks with which Stuart Hall wrestles, while Nick's obvious homosexual identity relegates him to the position of perpetual "guest," despite being from an "English" family from the country. For the Tories, individual economic success mandates a kind of materialism that leads to a more entitled sense of national identity and citizenship. Such "material prosperity," however, was extremely difficult to attain for many Britons as unemployment grew exponentially during the decade, with the result that already marginalized identities were pushed even further from the centre.

### **The Postmodern Investment: Nick, the Lloyd's Building, and the Spaces of Identity**

In the previous three chapters, I have focused on the relationship between identity formation and the spaces of the city. This analysis has included Sinclair's broad pseudo-fictional mythology of the layers of mapped identities always present in the landscape of the Thatcherite city; Welsh's fictional representation of tower blocks and the dilapidation of the individual citizen; and Ali's portrayal of the new British immigrant's simultaneous interrogation of and immersion in Thatcherite discursive practices. Like these authors, Hollinghurst also imagines the spaces of the Thatcherite city as contributing to the

construction and definition of individual identity. However, Hollinghurst's attention is turned to the inner workings of the aristocracy, both old and new, exploring its access to the spaces of capital as they are represented not only in the private domestic spaces of Tory MPs, but also in such publicly private spaces as the Lloyd's building in London. While Nick's purported purpose in visiting the Lloyd's building is to meet with his friend Sam, an investment banker, in order to put to fruitful financial use the money that Wani has given him, the observations he makes about the relationship between the building's postmodern architecture and the ways that he imagines people interacting and moving through its spaces provide an interesting insight into the way that Hollinghurst frames the centre of British capitalism.

The Lloyd's building was constructed between 1978 and 1986, and is spatially representative of the Thatcherite move toward free-market capitalism. Built by the architect Richard Rogers, who also designed the Pompidou Centre in Paris, the building is often referred to as the inside-out building because its staircases, elevators, electrical power conduits, and water mains are all exposed on the outside of the building. The Lloyd's building, in this sense, is an inversion of what we expect of the Brutalist modernist architecture that predominates much of post-war British landscape, with the exposed "guts" of the building revealing what David Harvey calls the "complexity" of urban spaces ("Postmodernism" 84). As Harvey asserts, some "architects strive to cultivate the labyrinthine qualities of urban environments by interweaving interiors and exteriors [...] or simply through the sense of an interior sense of inescapable complexity, an interior maze ... like that of the new Lloyd's building in London" (84). It is this sense of "inescapable complexity," of "an interior maze," that allows Nick, always immersed in a search for a

kind of Jamesian aestheticism, to attempt to project his own desires onto the spaces of the building.

His visit to the Lloyd's building reminds Nick, the ubiquitous "guest," of his role as outsider, and he reacts to the space with an outsider's mix of voyeurism and awe:

On the exposed escalators the employees were carried up and down, looking both slavish and intensely important. Nick watched the motorbike messengers in their sweaty waterproofs and leathers, and heavy boots. He felt abashed and agitated by closeness to so many people at work, in costume, in character, in the know. (*Line of Beauty* 178)

In his emphasis on the spatiality of the building, the "exposure" that the escalators suggest, and the uncomfortable "closeness" to the class-clash of employees and couriers, Hollinghurst calls our attention here to the ways in which proximity contributes to Nick's sense of self. Such proximity, I would suggest, is not unlike the spatial sense of "beside" that Kristeva argues is always deeply elided with abject identity formation. While Nick feels a certain discomfort through a kind of forced closeness, he also responds to the mixture and movement of space and people. Nick imagines a kind of pageantry inherent to a space such as the Lloyd's building, where the theatrical space includes costumes, movement, and the appearance of a knowledge only attained through such performance. Even the "motorbike messengers" have their role to play in what seems to be an orchestra of capitalism.

Out of place, Nick feels ashamed and nervous ("abashed and agitated") at the closeness to such a performance - a nervousness not unlike that experienced by the figure of Thatcher when she enters the domestic space of the Feddens' party. It is unclear, however,

if Nick has such feelings because he sees beyond the role-playing, or because, as an outsider, he can never hope to fully participate in it. As Andrew Eastam suggests, Nick's "broader anxiety is generated by the public dimension of the building and the kind of performances it generates" ("Inoperative Ironies" 518). Nick is unable to conceptualize the role that he might play in the spaces of the Lloyd's building, not only because he does not work there, or because essentially he is investing someone else's money, but also because the building, and the performance it generates, carries a kind of aesthetic value that is difficult for Nick to comprehend. Quite different from the ogee, what he describes as the "line of beauty," the snakelike flicker of an instinct, of two compulsions held in one unfolding movement," (*Line of Beauty* 176), the Lloyd's building is brash and overt in its functionality (the guts on the outside, as it were) completely lacking in the gracefulness of what Nick covets as aesthetically pleasing and understandable.

Instead, he imagines the Lloyd's building as contradictory in content. While he waits "under a palm tree in the atrium," he notices that the "commissionaire...still wore a tailcoat and a top hat" (178), implying a juxtaposition between nostalgic constructions of English aestheticism and a kind of postmodern colonial theme-parking of exotic horticulture. The building itself seems to have a pulse of its own: "the building had the glitter of confidence, and made and retained an unending and authentic noise out of air vents, the hubbub of voices and the impersonal trundling of the escalators" (178-179). In this sense, the building itself is performative. Nick's way of comprehending the building is by imagining the still-remaining

regions where Lord Kessler himself might be conducting business, at that level surely a matter of mere blinks and ironies, a matter of telepathy. He knew that the old

paneled boardroom had been retained, and that Lionel had hung some remarkable pictures in there. In fact he had said that Nick should call in one day and see the Kadinsky... (179).

The Lloyd's building is thus a simulacral space where Nick's desires and expectations of "the city" are confronted by the layering of postmodern architecture. His engagement with the building is modern in the sense that he experiences a kind of defamiliarization, or a sense of Jamesian surprise, that is both unsettling and in some sense full of potential. He perceives himself as dialectically always "other" and outside of the sociospatial hum of the individuals whom he sees moving through the spaces of the building, being "in the know" in a way that he simply is not.

Access to the space of the building is deeply elided with a kind of understanding or knowability that is outside of Nick's comprehension or direct experience. Nick wishes to be included in the activities that take place inside the building since they represent the new Britishness of global finance and consumerism, yet at the same time he is repelled by the garishness of the architecture and global commerce. In this way, he resembles the marginalized characters in Welsh's and Ali's novels, who are themselves often on the outside of the spaces of capital yet often complicit in them. Arguably, the Lloyds building is unsettling for Nick because of its deep relationship to the global structures of capital.

To echo Bruno Latour's example of the train that is at once neither global nor local, the Lloyd's building is always reaching out beyond the actual local place of the structure itself, and in this sense can most easily be understood spatially. It is this spatialization of the Lloyd's building that leads Nick to focus on the relations of the individuals within it. The building and its functions seem unknowable to Nick, and so the space of the building is in

many ways alienating yet deeply desirable because of such alienating “unknowability.” Here, too, he is uncomfortable with the seeming ease with which the relations between classes shift and sway. In response, Nick imagines the Lloyd’s building as a kind of homage to garishness, fed by the pace and volume of the “new money” that seems to disregard notions of tradition and history.

### **The Iron Lady, or the Lady Keeps on Turning**

The spaces that Hollinghurst portrays as affected by Thatcher and her Conservative policies go beyond the postmodern spaces of global capital, here embodied by the Lloyds building, to the domestic spaces of the upper classes. As Gerald Fedden, the MP with whom Nick Guest is staying, prepares for the party at which Thatcher is scheduled to make an appearance, his desire to control the PM’s every move, and in this sense her spatial presence, borders on obsessive. In addition to painting the front door blue (thus altering his domestic space to appear aesthetically, and publicly, Conservative) he explains to his wife Rachel “where the Lady would sit, whom she would speak to and how much she would have to drink” (*Line of Beauty* 323).<sup>68</sup> Gerald’s desire to manipulate Thatcher’s movement and interaction not only suggests a certain apprehension at having such a public figure enter into his domestic (and private) space, but reveals perhaps even more an anxiety rooted in his desire to be close to, and eventually intimately associated with, Thatcher in a way that would afford him some control over the kind of sociopolitical excess she represents.

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<sup>68</sup> There are various moments in the text that refer to Thatcher as an object to be protected and watched over. Perhaps the most obvious is when Nick observes ‘one of the men standing directly behind the PM, like a showman, protecting and exhibiting her’ (334).

When Bertrand Ouradi (the Lebanese convenience store magnate who knows Thatcher on a social level) says to Nick, “I do know [Gerald’s] madly in love with the Prime Minister. But it’s not quite clear if the passion is returned. She may be playing hard to get,” Mr. Ouradi’s wife retorts, “Ah, they’re all in love with her. She has blue eyes, and she hypnotizes them” (193). As Nunn points out, many

descriptions portray Thatcher as exceptional rather than an everyday or normal woman. They mark her as different, even inhuman in her capacity and ambition.

Furthermore, they frequently contain an undertow of sexual anxiety, and a frisson of desire on the part of the male and female commentators. (41)

Thatcher’s public persona as PM is, in this sense, sexualized; at the same time, as both Garber and Butler would agree, the way in which Thatcher performs, or is made to perform through the expectations of others, interrogates traditional expectations of the gendered role of women in British, and indeed Western, 1980s society.

Hollinghurst troubles the nickname “Iron Lady” in his description of Thatcher’s entrance into the Fedden home. Much like Nick inside the Lloyd’s building, Thatcher is portrayed here as slightly insecure and uncertain until she is able to perceive herself reflected in the eyes, and desires, of others, the image of a “clums[y]” Thatcher “scuttl[ing]” through the front door (328) standing in stark contrast to the usual commanding figure in the House of Commons. Hollinghurst thus frames her as out of her element in a domestic “unknown house” where the “high hall mirror” reflects the “faces of welcomers” as well as Thatcher’s “long-suppressed embarrassment” at her “clumsiness

transmuted into power” (328).<sup>69</sup> The kind of reflexiveness that the figure of Thatcher imagines in relation to the walls and mirrors at the Fedden household is similar to the kind of dialectic engagement Welsh invokes between the walls of the council flats and the heroin addicts in *Trainspotting*, though the sociopolitical expectations of, for example, Renton and Thatcher, are of course significantly different.

Similar to Welsh, Hollinghurst illustrates the domestic as “unknown” and “unfamiliar”; however, unlike in Welsh’s novel, the domestic is here rendered legible through Thatcher’s ability to see herself as a kind of “modern royalty” within that space. Victor Burgin, building on Lefebvre, argues that “every spatial envelope implies a barrier between the inside and out, but [...] this barrier is always relative and, in the case of membranes, permeable” (*Production* 147). As such, the Feddens’ house, a manifestation of the 1980s bourgeois estate filled with expensive art and antiques, and built upon Tory values, becomes the setting for a rupturing of the separation between public and private spheres, much as Thatcherite policies of privatization through the selling off of council housing severed any clear division between private and public discourse and space. As she enters the Feddens’ home, Thatcher is “welcomed” by the crowd and the “high hall mirror” in “a kind of rapture, that was bold and shy at once” (*Line of Beauty* 328). She shifts from being embarrassed and clumsy to “cheerful and practical[...]” in response to the crowd’s reception of her (328). As Nunn suggests, “recollections of an initial public encounter between a woman leader, colleagues and Conservative rank and file present Thatcher as

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<sup>69</sup> Perhaps this is an ironic portrayal compared to the real-life Thatcher who embraced her power, at least outwardly, with emphasis and delight. However, many people close to Thatcher during her political career, including her personal aide Andrew Thomson, have suggested that the public image of the ‘Iron Lady’ was often a show that covered up a persona taken up by an often tearful and doubtful Maggie. The symbolic public persona, the ‘Iron Lady’ as it were, struggled against the private ‘real’ woman.

troubled and nervous but also anxious to learn and mould herself as a competent professional politician” (67). Arguably, the way others look at her, specifically the way the MPs (all of whom are men) construct her through their gaze, transforms Thatcher from an awkward *guest* to a sexually-coveted figure of power. Male desire transforms Thatcher from “clumsy” and “scuttl[ing]” to “modern royalty.”

The portrayal of Thatcher as a coveted and sexualized figure (who is never named but only referred to as The Lady, Prime Minister, or PM) within the Feddens’ domestic space reveals the way in which fragmented images of her body have become cultural signifiers of “lust,” “greed,” and “power.” As the PM moves through the party, there is a “covetous glance at her hair” (*Line of Beauty* 334) and even more overt expressions of lust: “Sir Jonty ... lurched off after another passing female, which happened to be that of the PM. He looked back with a shake of the head: ‘Marvelous, you know... the Prime Minister...’” (331). While the other men desire her in a way similar to Gerald’s Oedipal fantasy, Nick, however, envisions her as a socially powerful aesthetic artifact: her face “was a fine if improbable fusion of Vorticist and the Baroque” (335). As Hannah suggests, “if public space is marked out in the novel by lines of privilege and homophobic exclusivity, style and its serpentine lines of beauty are, for Nick, key to cutting across those barriers” (88). Nick thus turns his engagement with Thatcher into an aesthetic experience that provides him with the kind of intimate proximity to her that the other men at the party, particularly Gerald, cannot hope to achieve.

Nick imagines a costumed version of Thatcher as he envisions her as disheveled yet overly made-up. Gazing at the Prime Minister, he observes

hair [that] was so perfect [and] started to picture it wet and hanging over her face. She was wearing a long black skirt and a wide-shouldered white-and-gold jacket, amazingly embroidered, like a Ruritanian uniform, cut low at the front to display a magnificent pearl necklace. Nick peered at the necklace, and the large square bosom, and the motherly fatness of the neck. (*Line of Beauty* 329)

Nick's vision of the Prime Minister is quite different from the other men's "covetous glances" or Sir Jonty's musings about her "bottom." Indeed, Nick's fantasy of Thatcher is couched in terms that are both intimate and formally distant. References to her "wet hair" and "the motherly fatness of [her] neck" juxtapose images of maternal familiarity with the kind of social royalty represented by her "magnificent pearl necklace" and elaborate clothing. In addition, Nick's comparison of Thatcher's outfit to "a Ruritanian uniform" invokes the often-spoofed genre of the Ruritanian Romance from the late Victorian period in a way that takes up the costumed pageantry that Thatcher invoked at the end of the Falklands War,<sup>70</sup> as well as drawing attention to Thatcher's attempts to resurrect England as a kind of Ruritanian nation through her espousal of Victorian ideals.<sup>71</sup> Clothing her in a "Ruritanian uniform" is not only a tongue-in-cheek suggestion that Thatcher has outdated taste in fashion (Nick tells Catherine that her clothing makes her look like "a country and western singer" [333]), but also that she is ideologically rooted in a made-up land with

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<sup>70</sup> Thatcher turned the "long drawn out return of ships and men" from the Falklands War into a moment of English victory through "a seemingly endless media exposure" that was "consumed vicariously through press and TV" in a way that adapted the nostalgic colonial national identity that Thatcher coveted for the late twentieth century (Gray 274).

<sup>71</sup> Anthony Hope's novels *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894), *The Heart of Princess Osra* (1896) and *Rupert Hentzau* (1898) are set in the fictional kingdom of Ruritania. Over time, the fictional kingdom has come to stand for any made-up country lacking in name or specific geography. The stories themselves often revolve around mishaps of love and betrayal in aristocratic circles.

fictional ideas about the kinds of prosperity possible through neoliberal ideas of consumption, privatization, and individual opportunity, ideas, the novel suggests, impossibly at odds with an entrenched English class structure. Nick's role as aesthete provides him with a kind of insight into Thatcher's choice of dress and jewelry that moves beyond the superficial towards a broader social commentary. Arguably, his desire to consume the figure of Thatcher in this way is borne out of his recognition that she occupies a complicated gendered social space similar to the one in which he also exists.

Taking into account Nunn's argument of the fragmented Thatcherite body, I am interested in the way that Hollinghurst troubles the figure of Thatcher by moving beyond a merely straight interpretation of Thatcher's symbolic identity as fragmented towards a representation of Thatcher as freely moving between gendered identities, thus creating an opportunity for Nick to access her in a way unavailable to the other, straight, men. The MPs at the party are unable to connect with Thatcher in any meaningful way because while they possess a similar kind of "self-indulgence" and "lust" to that embodied by the figure of Nick Guest, they also engage in an Oedipal fantasy of Thatcher that makes initiating intimate contact, and consuming Thatcher as a social commodity in the way that Nick does, impossible.

The interaction that Hollinghurst constructs between Nick and Thatcher is significant because Nick's composite identity as a gay, academic, drug-addicted aesthete outwardly portrays the "power, lust, greed, heady success, self-indulgence, [and] egotism" that, as Nunn suggests, the images of Thatcher's body come to represent (172). In this sense, Nick's interaction with Thatcher uncovers her body as a sociopolitical commodity that he consumes, however briefly, within the social space of the party. Such consumption

disrupts the expectations of gender and authority with which the MPs struggle, in the process revealing a connection between Thatcher and Nick that does not extend to the other straight men and women at the party. Ironically, while Thatcher's social policies excluded gay identities from, for example, the public school curriculum (in keeping with Section 28), Hollinghurst suggests that fluid gender identity may have more in common with Thatcher than do the straight men and women who surround her, and that such commonalities are easily played out within domestic spaces such as the Feddens' party.

In his intimate interaction with Thatcher, Nick is also able simultaneously to occupy the private space of the Feddens as a venue for the kind of performative engagement with the PM that will be publicly talked about in newspapers and tabloids. Nick's desire for "commentary... history" (*Line of Beauty* 335), fueled by drugs and alcohol, pushes him to ask Thatcher to accompany him onto the dance floor (even though "dons were not the PM's favourite people" (331)) while the other men around him "sniggered and recoiled at an audacity that had been beyond them" (335). Her response to his approach, as "she smiled back with a certain animal quickness, a bright blue challenge" (335), echoes Nunn's attention to the signifying "flash of blue... [and] harsh close up of her mouth" (172) in a way that suggests Hollinghurst's awareness of the fragmented representations of Thatcher prevalent in the 1980s. Such an echo, however, also implies Hollinghurst's strategy to uproot Thatcher from an intensely gendered role to one that is not only fluid, but also, specifically here, floating between the human and "animal." Where the other men worry about engaging with Thatcher as they approach, "obviously longing for [their wives] to get lost so [they] can have a hot date with the Lady" (*Line of Beauty* 333), Nick envisions Thatcher as a political and social artifact - something that can be possessed and displayed,

as though she were a fine piece of antique furniture with the kind of accompanying “commentary” and “history” with which he desires to be publicly associated.

For Nick, Thatcher does not represent the sexualized “hot date” but rather becomes a sociopolitical commodity, an emblem of the excess that he wishes to consume in a way that will furnish him with a kind of social high, perhaps similar to the one he gets from the cocaine and illicit sex he pursues immediately following his encounter with the Prime Minister. Much like the ownership of property that offers the Thatcherite subject a sense of contribution as a British citizen, Nick’s possession of Thatcher spatializes her as a kind of commodity to be traded for access and social status. His role as a drug-addicted aesthete is thus emboldened by his ability to access and consume Thatcher in a way that the other male figures are unable to until he paves the way. It is only after Nick dances with Thatcher, effectively outing her as a kind of floor-show, that Gerald steps in and dances with her for the majority of the remaining evening.

As Nick walks Thatcher onto the dance floor, he thinks to himself that “Gerald hadn't got it quite right: she moved in her own accelerated element, her own garlanded perspective, she didn't give a damn about squares on the wallpaper or blue front doors - she noticed nothing, and yet she remembered everything” (336). In Nick’s mind, Thatcher is almost inhuman and unable to perceive her own role outside of popular perception because she “noticed nothing, and ... remembered everything.” Nick imagines that Thatcher has a kind of magical, perhaps even inhuman, ability to control and “hypnotize” the men around her with a “certain animal quickness” (335) that separates her from the other women in the house. Her figure is still sexualized in Nick’s interaction with her – Gerald notices that “a couple of whiskies on, [Thatcher] was getting down rather sexily with Nick” (336) – but in

a way that suggests a specific recognition of and reverence for her “animal quickness” and “garlanded perspective” (335).

A kind of social commerce thus takes place at the Feddens’ party. Nick, as the aesthete, is able to acquire and invest in the social currency of the PM as her partner on the dance floor because he synthesizes the fragments of Thatcher’s body in a way that reveals her free-floating gendered identity. Thatcher’s body does not need to be fragmented, as Nunn suggests many such as Peter York imagined, in order for it to be socially understood. In this sense, Nick successfully consumes Thatcher’s body in terms of his own social production, and thus also engages in a postmodern capitalist exchange where he purchases history through the social currency he acquires as a result of his intimacy with the Prime Minister. Nick seems to understand the relevance of his engagement with Thatcher in terms of the “overarching cultural situation” and significations that her body has come to represent within 1980s British society (Antonia 207). He consumes her in a way that buys him history amidst the partygoers and tabloid journalists. It is not Thatcher herself who interests him, but rather the social currency he is able to distill through his physical engagement with the kinds of social signification she has come to represent.

### **Let’s Dance: Consuming the Thatcherite Body**

The introduction of the figure of Thatcher into Hollinghurst’s text reveals some of the sociopolitical and sociospatial contradictions surrounding 1980s British privatization. Specifically, Hollinghurst represents these contradictions through Thatcher’s intimate engagement with the figure of Nick Guest within the domestic spaces of the Feddens’ house. Nick acts as a foil for the constructed public persona of Hollinghurst’s Thatcher not because he is an aspiring entrepreneur or a capitalist who invests the money Wani gives to

him while marketing himself as an aesthete in order to secure his position at Ogee Magazine, but rather because of an extreme consumption, desire for history, and free-floating gendered identity that he comes to embody during the latter half of the novel. Nick embodies the consumptive “lust” and “greed” that, as Nunn argues, became synonymous with Thatcher’s signifying body.

While Thatcher publicly denounced the kinds of consumption that Nick partakes in (specifically gay sex, through the enactment of Section 28), there is a tangible irony in the way that Thatcher’s first meaningful contact at the Feddens’ party is with Nick. Arguably, she is portrayed as a Janus-faced matriarchal leader. Nicky Marsh compares the two sides of Thatcher to the English currency, since it was given the nickname “Maggie” during the 1980s: “‘Maggie’ became the term of the pound coin that was newly minted in the 1980s because, it was said, ‘it’s brassy, two-faced and thinks it’s a sovereign’” (40). Marsh’s comparison between Thatcher and the pound coin is significant because it implies a kind of social currency represented in the Thatcherite body. The excesses of “lust,” “greed,” and “power” that Thatcher’s economic policies brought about were intimately tied to an exclusive national identity rooted in Thatcherite ideas of wealth and consumption.

Arguably, the greater significance of Thatcher at the Feddens’ party is the way she is revealed as an interstitial figure as she performs a kind of floorshow of gender and politics through her interaction with Nick Guest and the other men. Conventional ideas of gender and other traditional sociocultural associations represented by images of Thatcher’s body and clothing are transformed into a much more fluid, ambivalent performance when she is accompanied out onto the dance floor by Nick. Thatcher’s exclusionary politics are intriguingly troubled when she accepts Nick’s request to dance ahead of invitations by

other, heterosexual, men. However, the Bowie-esque fluidity of her role as PM, modern “royalty,” and mother-figure is brought to an abrupt end when Gerald Fedden sees Nick dancing with her. The way that Gerald takes over Nick’s position on the dance floor, and dances with Thatcher for a lengthy time after, suggests the Conservative desire to restore what Hannah calls the “heteronormative house of capitalist acquisition” and thus also return Thatcher to a knowable and “safe” position relative to the men’s Oedipal desire for her. Gerald subverts Nick’s attachment to Thatcher in a way that denies Nick a real position in the aristocratic Conservative circle because of his sexuality. Gerald also subverts, and essentially denies, Nick’s ability to reveal the existence of a free-floating gendered identity inherent to Thatcher’s constructed public persona. Significantly, this interaction takes place within the Feddens’ “dwelling space” (Procter) and, in turn, we see that the figure of Thatcher is only ever acquired through a kind of struggle between the public and the private. Just as Ali’s Nazneen has to move out into the urban spaces surrounding her flat to alter her domestic experience, Nick and Gerald make moves to interact with Thatcher within the domestic space in order to alter their own public positions.

Hollinghurst teases out Thatcher’s fragmented identity through the way the MPs, and men such as Bertrand Ouradi, sexualize Thatcher’s role as a national matriarch who is constantly gendered as female despite her own attempts to encourage a more fluid and ambivalent gender identity. Watching over and directing the movement of Britons onto the global stage of capital during the 1980’s, Thatcher could, in this sense, be envisioned as an Oedipal figure through mediated representations of her body (her eyes, her hair, etc). Since, as Nunn has suggested, fragmentary representations of her became symbols of “heady success” and “excess,” possessing her in an Oedipal sense provides the men with a

fulfillment of their desire to get close to, and possess, a piece of the ultimate success in British sociopolitics. The desire to gender Thatcher solely as a woman provides the MPs who surround her with an opportunity to construct her as Other (according to Lacan, woman is always already Other) and thus imagine her as the symbolic mother. As the Prime Minister, Thatcher becomes the female figure who attends to the needs of her people; thus she becomes “the mother in her role as the primordial Other. It is she who introduces the child into language by interpreting the child’s screams and thereby retroactively determining their meaning” (D. Evans 119). In this way, Thatcher becomes the mother figure who, through public policy and social reform, “interprets” the “screams” of her citizens in order to control the economy and social infrastructure of Great Britain.

Gerald needs Thatcher to acknowledge him within his domestic space in order to legitimize and authorize his social and political importance within his circle of colleagues and friends. Gerald’s desire is for a proximity to power, and the potential to possess or harness the power that her body comes to represent, rather than simply for Thatcher as an individual woman. His desire to control her is, in this sense, played out within the domestic much in the way that gender struggles are often enacted in relation to labour value and familial dominance. Just like the Oedipal son who never fully conceives of the mother as an individual sexual being but rather as a prize to be won after competition with the father, Gerald wishes to possess Thatcher in a way that the other MPs cannot. Hollinghurst’s portrayal of Thatcher at the party, and specifically her interaction with Nick Guest, however, disrupts the Oedipal pursuit of the MPs. Nick essentially disturbs the male desire centered on the figure of Thatcher as a woman in a way that denies the kinds of heterosexual implications that, for example, the *Spitting Image* puppet also subverts.

## **Conclusion: Two Sides to Every Thatcher**

Writing *The Line of Beauty* in 2004, after Thatcher's ousting and with the Labour party of Tony Blair firmly in power, Hollinghurst nevertheless takes aim at the ways Thatcher's policies of privatization, immigration, social reform, centralization, and issues around gay rights still haunt British culture. In interviews, Hollinghurst has stated his belief that the Thatcherite revolution "led to huge changes in British society and changes which I think we are still living with now" (Hollinghurst *Talk Asia*), and he has expressed disappointment in Blair's Labour government for carrying out political moves that Thatcher herself may have hesitated to pursue (Hollinghurst *Readings*). The failed attempt by the Labour Government to overturn Section 28 in 2000, for example, coupled with direct British involvement in the Iraq War, provided perhaps a sense of nervous nostalgia for a time when war and the oppression of marginalized groups may have been implemented to create a greater sense of national identity and patriotism.

While Section 28 was finally repealed in 2003, the year before *The Line of Beauty* was published, Hollinghurst's novel can be read as a commentary on his disappointment in Labour in the years following Thatcher, and thus in this sense Hollinghurst imagines the ghostly, revenant, presence of Thatcher that haunts contemporary British sociopolitical discursive practices. By reworking traditionally straight ideas of a fragmented representation of Thatcher, Hollinghurst rewrites her for the contemporary moment through her interaction with Nick Guest, thus suggesting that though the specter of Thatcherite social policy remains, Thatcher and perhaps Thatcherism itself might still be rewritten by gay and other marginalized communities. Indeed, in recent years, gay communities have begun to frame Thatcher herself as a gay icon. As Philip Flynn has suggested,

even in a book as scathing as Hollinghurst's there is a note of quiet admiration for its ghostly subject herself, whilst slowly and beautifully unpicking her decimation of the country. It's easy enough to see why. Straight, powerful men feared Mrs. Thatcher. They were emasculated in her presence. And if that is enough to bestow the status of gay icon upon Cher - and believe me, it is - then history may yet prove it to be sufficient to crown the unlikeliest gay icon of them all. (n.pag.)

Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* portrays Thatcher as haunting contemporary British sociopolitics not only through the policies and free market strategies her government set in motion, but also through the way in which her free-floating gendered identity troubled traditionally male gendered roles. Such a representation thus allows marginalized identities, such as Nick Guest, to reconfigure her gendered identity in a way that 'straight' men simply cannot. In this sense, Hollinghurst's portrayal of Thatcher builds upon, and pushes further, the kind of "gender trouble" in which the *Spitting Image* puppet engages. Hollinghurst reworks the representation of Thatcher to include the implications of Thatcherite policies that endured well into the 1990s.

## CONCLUSION

### **Thatcher in Space, or the Spaces of Thatcher**

Much like the mapping of the Thames at once divides and links up the various boroughs of London, this dissertation has taken Edward Soja's "spatial turn" as it informs the nexus of identity, space, and capital in the British city during and after Thatcher. Its composition can thus be understood, following Sinclair, as a map with a special agenda. The common thread that runs through each of these mappings is the way in which space, and access to space, was radically changed as a result of Thatcherite policies of deregulation and privatization. Henri Lefebvre imagines the map as an ideological production of space that "is at once a precondition and a result of social superstructures" ("Production of Space" 95-6). By distilling the nuances of identity formation in urban spaces, the present study remaps the British city in a way that, after Lefebvre, refocuses attention back on the social production of the "transformation of space" (Soja 144). At stake, then, are not only the various representations of the Thatcherite and post-Thatcherite city in the literary case studies I have chosen, but also, and more broadly, an imagining of the dialectic relationship between space, identity, and capitalism in a way that acknowledges the fact that issues such as unemployment, violence, and abject drug abuse are social phenomena that are themselves firmly rooted in space.

Each of my chapters has examined literary representations of Thatcherite urban space through different perspectives: the heritage industry and the spatial sediment of local history; council housing and abject identity formation; immigrant populations and the spaces of capital; and, finally, representations of marginalized identities and access to public and private space. The first and second chapters of this project uncover the ways in

which individual British citizens form identity through spatialized ideological pressures and histories already existing within the urban fabric of the city. Iain Sinclair's attention to the layering of history and identity in and through the urban spaces of London in *Lights Out for the Territory* provides a new way of thinking about how identity becomes spatially mapped on to the historical residue of the bricks, buildings, and passageways of the city. Sinclair outlines the kinds of challenges and disruptions that arise out of the Thatcherite heritage industry as it sought to capitalize on specific moments in English history in a manner that essentially erased existing spatiohistorical significances. *Lights Out for the Territory* draws attention to the ways in which space is dialectically engaged in sociohistorical identity formation, thus highlighting the ways that forgotten and (in the Thatcherite sense) unprofitable identities are located, and often buried, in the spaces of London. In its interrogation of specific Thatcherite discursive practices, Sinclair's text confronts a Thatcherite nostalgia manufactured through England's National Heritage theme-parking of an "authentic" and privatized English identity.

The kinds of spaces that Sinclair aligns, or puts "beside" as Sedgwick would suggest, create a localized anti-nostalgia deeply reliant on space and juxtaposition through an insistence on the idea that identities and spaces in London exist not in isolation but always in relation to each other. Sinclair's interrogation of National Heritage and the privatization of English history subverts the notion that the commodification of history is without collateral damage. Relying on the tension between imagination and actual historical accounts, Sinclair's investigation of British urban spaces thus offers, as a case study, a representation of the potential loss of local memory, history, and identity at the hands of the marketplace.

While Sinclair's *Lights Out for the Territory* broadly considers heritage and identity within a spatiohistorical context, Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* investigates the nexus of space, identity, and class in the fractured identities of working class individuals during the Thatcher period. In Welsh's novel, the kinds of ruptures and fractures that the Tory-described "new under class" experienced during the Thatcher period and beyond are deeply connected to the spaces in which they live and the ways in which those spaces are framed sociopolitically. Lefebvre's "production of space" helps to illustrate how *Trainspotting* disrupts essentializing notions of identity categories such as class through a temporally disjointed narrative structure, as well as through representations of different identities that all share similar living conditions yet experience them in significantly diverse ways. Thus, the seemingly homogenous category of "under class" is troubled in Welsh's text as he explores variant identities formed in and through the spaces of council estates that in turn echo the fractured nature of the abject subject (Lee). The "anxiety" and "suspicion" that Welsh's characters feel are not only a consequence of abject drug abuse and crime, but also of the intense neoliberal individualism that inevitably infected the residents of council estates desperate to gain some form of material wealth that would simultaneously ensure them, as Thatcher and Douglas Hurd insisted, a sense of British identity and citizenship. The example of council housing proves to be highly significant in studying the effects of privatization and individual ownership as they intensified the social ills of violence, crime, and isolation so prevalent in the city. As Welsh's work demonstrates, there is a significant dialectic relationship between space, class, and identity in a way that is not easily unpacked. While many right-leaning cultural critics and politicians may have been comfortable in labeling the state-reliant as "chavs" (council housed and violent), the political convenience

of allowing many estates to fall apart and become essential prisons for the disenfranchised is addressed in Welsh's novel through a reviling not only of the unachievable "choices" that Thatcherite individualism offers, but also of the ways in which such individualism comes at the loss of the kinds of sociospatial histories that Sinclair argues are so significant to a historical sense of self in the city.

Drawing further on the relationship between the spaces of council estates and the struggle over neoliberal individualism, Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* investigates the ways in which marginalized identities form and reform in and around British social spaces. While Welsh's *Trainspotting* uncovers the ways by which the dilapidated condition of the council flats contribute to the stigmatization and disease of the individuals within, Ali's *Brick Lane* imagines a new kind of Britishness that relies on a kind of spatialized financial independence as a way to access the spaces of the city. Ali's novel invokes a problematic Thatcherite sense of Britishness through an exploration of the ways by which the accumulation of wealth provides increasing access to space. Such access to space, however, is represented as risking the loss of ethnicity and community in favour of Thatcherite notions of British identity through accumulation of wealth. Ali's novel proposes a kind of multicultural Britishness that rejects the nostalgic working-class Englishness that Enoch Powell declared was at risk during his "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968 in favour of a hybrid identity much more dependent on the dialectic relationship between space, capital, and language. *Brick Lane* thus problematically imagines a hybrid Britishness that strategically assimilates certain Thatcherite notions of entrepreneurialism and financial individualism, while rejecting not only Powellite notions of Englishness, but also local Bengali ideas of tradition, culture, and the role of women in the Bengali community.

*Brick Lane*'s representations of race, space, and individualism, deeply nestled amidst the political climate of the early-to-mid 1980s, provides a view of the ways by which many immigrant identities moved within the neoliberal spaces of the Thatcherite city through a kind of strategic adoption of entrepreneurialism and abandonment of cultural identity. In doing so, however, the novel runs the risk of simplifying the struggle between race, class, and space by implying that Nazneen is able to find independence and freedom only through her participation in the accumulation of capital and the resulting willing desertion of her ethnic identity. If space is socially produced, as Lefebvre argues, Ali's text somewhat problematically legitimizes and even celebrates the link between individualism and neoliberal forms of wealth accumulation by locating Nazneen's participation in the mode of production within the domestic space of her council flat. Just as Welsh imagines Renton achieving financial freedom only by ripping off his friends, Ali's Nazneen only ever achieves financial freedom by creating an identity for herself that turns away from her ethnic heritage toward Thatcherite notions of individualism and wealth accumulation.

While Ali and Welsh both in their different ways examine representations of marginalized individuals working through the dialectics of space and identity within council estates, in *The Line of Beauty* Alan Hollinghurst turns to representations of the middle and upper classes in the Thatcherite city. Hollinghurst's novel confronts Thatcherite policies of deregulation and postmodern free market economics in a way that draws attention to the kinds of access individuals had to increasingly privatized spaces, and the way that even those with access to such spaces often end up as outsiders. Hollinghurst spatializes popularly consumed images of Thatcher as *deregulated* and divided (her hair, her handbag, her clothing, etc.) in a way that takes into account Heather Nunn's argument

of the fragmented Thatcherite body. In this sense, Hollinghurst's novel is a case study of accessibility and exclusion in terms both of proximity to the figure of Thatcher and of access to the places that symbolically represent Thatcherite Conservative policies of privatization.

In addition to focusing on the domestic space of the Feddens' party, Hollinghurst also explores the spatial aspect of the Lloyd's building in London. In *The Line of Beauty*, the Lloyd's building, spatially symbolic of the ideological and financial impact that Thatcherite policies of deregulation had on city spaces, functions as a physical reminder of Thatcherite deregulation built right into the fabric of the city. The architecture of the building (listed in 2011 as architecturally significant by National Heritage), with its exposed elevators and shopping-mall-like atrium, was the most notable postmodern structure in London in the 1980s, and it is that postmodernism that, as Jameson might argue, contextualizes and makes concrete the alienation that deregulation and privatization can elicit in the individual. While Nazneen in *Brick Lane* is awe-struck and inspired by the imposing glass tower of capitalism, in *The Line of Beauty* the Lloyd's building is represented as a sinister manifestation of Thatcher's deregulated market that offers Nick nothing more than feelings of alienation and loss. Without success, Nick attempts to imagine the existence of a Jamesian aesthetic somewhere in the hidden offices of the building in a way that reflects a kind of academic nostalgia inherent in his desire to find a Victorian sense of English identity outside of Thatcherite postmodern capitalism. The struggle, as Lefebvre suggests, is over the way that identity is arrived at through this alienation and limited access to space; Nick's social status as middle class and gay always already denies him access to such spaces.

All the texts discussed above were written after 1990, the year that Thatcher left office. Thus, they offer insight into the post-Thatcherite city where the reverance of Thatcherite policies of privatization and deregulation continues to haunt British urban spaces. Through the luxury of temporal distance, these texts offer a considered critical approach that rewrites Thatcherism as deeply concomitant with neoliberalism and uneven development as it is related to urban space and the formation of individual identity. This project thus contributes to the study of contemporary British Literature and British cultural studies through its specific implementation of spatial theory and Marxist geography as a way to understanding how Thatcherite policies of privatization and deregulation are most deeply recognizable and understood through a spatiocultural examination of representations of identity formation in British urban space. As such, this study promotes the usefulness of employing urban spatial theory as a necessary tool in the interpretation not only of the epoch of Thatcher as it continues to affect notions of identity, both at the local and national levels, but also in an exploration of how, more broadly, sociopolitical politics are always rooted in space. This study thus lays bare the dialectic relationship between space and identity in order to subvert the notion that issues such as gentrification, class, and immigration are social phenomena that exist outside of space. As David Harvey suggests, urban space is “somewhere where fact and imagination simply have to fuse”; and nowhere is this more dynamic/striking than in the narratives of this time (“The Urban Experience” 5). In laying bare the sociospatial dialectic as it is reflected and engaged in my chosen texts, I have distilled through my four literary case studies the possibilities for a new way of thinking about space and identity that challenges the seemingly innocuous methods of

spatial acquisition and ownership that are inherently tied to Thatcherite notions of privatization.

This project contributes to the relationship between literary studies and urban spatial theory by offering different aspects of the space-identity dialectic in the British city. It draws attention to, as Sinclair asserts, the spatial traces of local and national historical identity formation and how uneven development and gentrification in many ways work to erase the evidence of such historical identity formations. My analysis of the dialectic relationship between identity and space in council estates in Welsh's text, and the social stigmatization that contributes to such identity formation, opens up the possibility for future research into the nuances of the construction of sociospatial identities. My study of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* offers a representation of female immigrant identity that eventually depends on the spaces of the council flat and the urban spaces around the estate to continue the process of identity formation, specifically focusing on the way that such identity formation relies on participation in capitalist production as a way to understand the role of the immigrant in the British capitalist system. Lastly, my analysis of Allan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* explores the manner in which domestic space, the sexualization of the figure of Thatcher, and representations of the Lloyd's building provide insight into the ways that gay identities, AIDS, and drug abuse were deeply elided with Thatcherite ideals of consumption and wealth accumulation. Reading these texts alongside each other gives way to a potent investigation and criticism of the affects of Thatcherite policies of privatization that were crystallized in the city and beyond. It is through such texts that we come to understand and know the British city under and after Thatcher.

Studying the relationship between urban spatial theory and literary representations of identity formation in an era such as Thatcher's can enrich our understanding of the relationship between space and identity as they relate to the gentrification and commodification of space through the heritage industry, the selling off of council estates, the construction of domestic space as factory, or the struggle over class, space, and marginalized identities. In this way, this project offers what I hope is a nuanced approach to representations of the nexus of politics, culture, and shifts in capitalism that shade our everyday experiences. By foregrounding space as produced through such struggle, the ways in which space is occupied, owned, and gentrified can be reassessed as deeply concomitant with the ways in which both local and national identities are forged.

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